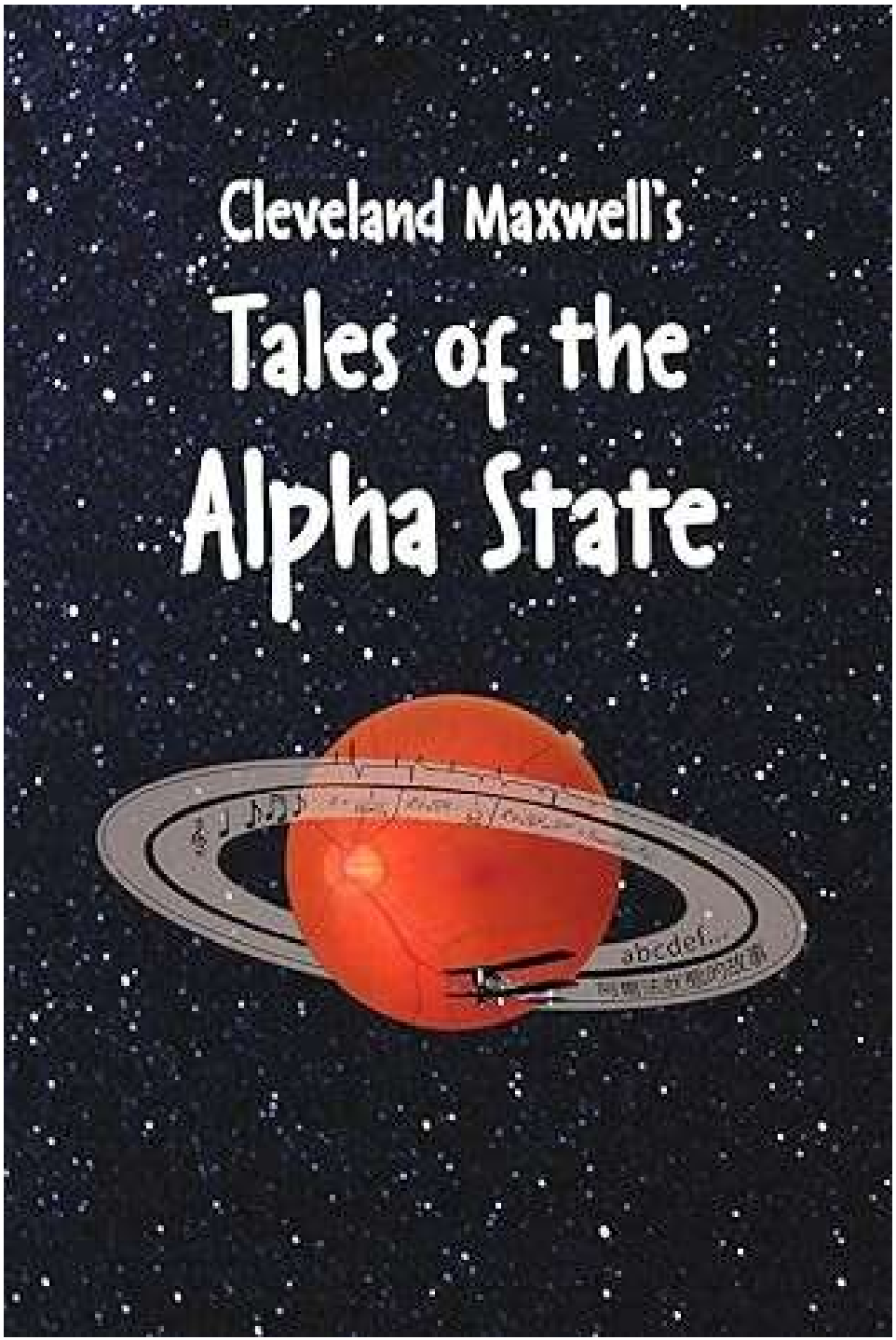

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Cleveland Maxwell's

Tales of the Alpha State

by Cleveland Maxwell

New Journalism Project
Austin, Texas

Cleveland Maxwell's Tales of the Alpha State

CLEVELAND MAXWELL'S TALES OF THE ALPHA STATE

Writing this introduction for my long-time friend Cleveland Maxwell is a second nature reflex requiring no effort at all: I can honestly say I feel like I have known Cleveland Maxwell most of my life. It is almost as if Cleveland Maxwell were in some weird way an integral part of me. And, during these long years, I can also honestly say that he has never ceased to amaze me with his absurd humor, crazed polemics, and thought-provoking short stories.

Cleveland Maxwell is a total unknown; hardly any of his works have ever been published, and even his published materials have appeared only in the most esoteric of the small press with limited distribution and even more limited readership.

Maxwell's obscurity is probably because he never seriously attempted to submit his works for publication. While I know for a fact that he would have loved to have been published for the mass audience, he simply never undertook the effort to promote his own writings. He considered even his finished short stories to be unfinished, always changing a word or phrase every time he went back to review them, always looking for that state of perfection in a short story that none of us can achieve, always picking at his stories as one would pick at a scab. His files are collections upon collections of hurriedly hand-written notes that sometimes proved to be illegible even to him as he would attempt to decipher them; and if not illegible, many times incomprehensible, as if the Muse had only teased him with an idea and then so cruelly left him the inability to remember it.

The following pages are the first collection of his short stories and wild ramblings to have ever been published, and their publication is a project I have given myself in order to see the whole matter through. For the most part they have not been published elsewhere. When reading them after he finally allowed me the privilege, I decided then and there that it was high time to see to it that they were published. Hopefully they will be printed before he decides they need any more revision!

They are for the large part a strange compilation of absurdity, attempts with words to tease the psyche of his readers, just as the Muse had teased him with the ideas. Some of the more serious stories are set in a field of subterranean humor which manifest themselves in strange, dream-like forms, as in "LOgrithm 6-7968: Testimony of Nicotine Jones to Readers of the Lost Art." Maxwell himself would be the first to admit that the dream world, or "alpha-state", as he called it, was a guiding locus of his story-telling inspirations; hence the title to this compilation.

But there is also a dark edge to some of the tales that border on the horrific.

In spite of the fact that I have known Cleve all of my adult life, I know little of his background. I will admit that I never did inquire much as to his early life--nothing is known of his childhood and formative years; I know of no record of his birth, parents, schooling, or even financial and social security records. He never seemed to have a lot of money, nor did I ever know him to work at a job that ever made him a dime other than the occasional sale of a small press tabloid, but this did not prevent him from receiving tons of credit card applications at his Austin post office box. But personally he had nothing to hide; always open, friendly, gregarious and out-going, the figurative drunk at a party who was always witty, entertaining, and thought provoking, even if no one could remember his name at the end of the night's festivities. It is as if he were non-existent, a time transient in the ether, a "fig-newton of my own imagination", as he would often describe himself.

There was always that strange, schizophrenic quality and atmosphere about Cleve, a quality which the earnest reader will

find in his short stories. You could never tell when he was his normal self or in one of his playful meanderings into the minds of his prospective readers. His personas were many: That of serious writer, energetic literary enthusiast, goofy clown, amateur musician, righteous polemicist, or a half-dozen other states of mind which most certainly will make him appear to be a couple of quarts low to most people.

I think that Maxwell moved to Austin, Texas in June of 1981, if my memory serves me correctly. He said he moved here from San Saba and the semi-arid regions just north of the Texas Hill Country, looking for work. I guess I first met Cleve in September of 1983 at one of his usual no-excuse-at-all parties on East 48 1/2 Street, and I spent several hours getting to know him and his wacky bunch of drunk and stoned friends. We became quick friends, taking time out during the following week to get together to discuss various literary ideas of mutual interest. I think partially as a result of our discussions, he set up Cleveland Maxwell Productions in October of '83, the vehicle he would use to promote his literary and creative works.

Over the next few years we would produce several small press publications, most notably *The Austin Duckweed*, and often we teamed up with our zany confederates. It seemed to us that we could almost make a fortune from our work, if creativity alone could create a dollar. The truth be known, after the expenses, we probably never made more than the amount needed to procure a couple of six-packs for our next exercise.

Cleveland Maxwell's literary style is unique. He is fixated in the first person singular, at a time when many editors will refuse to even look at anything written in the first person. (But I am noticing that this style is being more and more favored by some of the greats like Stephen King). Why this is so one can only speculate; my own theory is that Cleve lives and expresses his own unique deliriousness within his stories; that he himself *is* that first person and that the dream inspiration for his stories becomes his singular expression of those stories. He is involved personally in his tales. Perhaps he has lived those experiences in his mind if not elsewhere. Definitely the signature of a madman. But, methinks there is much method to his madness. One has but to survey the symbolism is some of his works to see past the madcap.

There is another unique feature about Maxwell's stories. With rare exception, one will find that Cleveland Maxwell himself is a character or a reference in each of his unique fables: be it as a main character, a peripheral one, or even as a mere subtle reference, one will find his name cropping up in most every one of his crazed tales. The motif is Hitchcockesque, and the reader will find themselves anxiously scanning the pages to see where Maxwell is mentioned therein. This is one of the more unique parts of the Cleveland Maxwell experience. His stories run the gamut from the Lovecraftian to the Monty-Pythonian.

How would I describe Cleveland Maxwell? In many various, splendid ways:

A couple of bubbles off plumb. A few bricks short of a load. Missing a few nuts and bolts. Several cards short of a deck. Perhaps even as an old foreman once put it, "a couple of fries short of a Happy Meal." And this would probably only be the beginning. Cleve himself would probably describe himself more eloquently, probably something along the lines of having "locked rotor current in the corpus callosum" or "suffering terminal zanity in the frontal lobe", or any equally mad description. But whatever the adjective or description, there is only one---Thank Providence---Cleveland Maxwell. And it is my distinct delight to introduce that crazed animal and his collection of looney stories to you.

Cleveland Maxwell
San Saba, Texas, March, 2054

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Hi. Please allow me to introduce myself.

I'm Cleveland Maxwell. These are my stories. I hope you enjoy them.

And, Lordy, they are some mighty strange tales indeed. They are some of the strangest things I have ever seen. It all started when I was a disabled pipefitter living at the Robert E. Lee Hotel in San Antonio. Not in this quadrant of the time-space continuum, mind you, but in one relatively close.

But I am getting ahead of myself....

TO: HOMEBASE

FROM: Current On-Duty Operative

RE: Cleveland Maxwell's Tales of the Alpha State

CC: SAC in Charge

DATE: Current

On Duty operative reports that it appears ALPHA signals are beginning to materialize.

Calibration is in progress.

Do not adjust your set.

INVOCATION FOR THE BISHOP OF HEARTS

Cleveland Maxwell stared blankly over downtown San Antonio from his perch at the fourth floor window of the Robert E. Lee Hotel, watching as the yellow lines of North Flores Avenue wove themselves together into a French braid. He was drunk again.

A Datsun and an old Chevrolet pickup truck raced each other for position to the next stop light, coming to a draw as the light shifted to amber. Across the hall in 408 he could hear the Albertsons going at it tooth and nail again, their shouts and screams filling the quiet April air. The current couple in 409 was quiet for the time being, probably smoking a cigarette or something.

Maxwell took another hearty drought from his brown bag and reached for his crumbled pack of Marlboros, still staring absent-mindedly from his roost above North Flores. All in all, it had been a pretty easy weekend, even if he had to throw out a tenant on Eight. But the guy was an asshole. He was always gone, only showing up drunk to beat up on his wife and kids. Lord knows Cleve had given him enough warning.

Cleve got up from the rickety stool by the window, pouring the remaining fluid ounce of his brown bag down his throat. God, I need to quit this shit, he burped loudly and exclaimed to himself as he un-twisted the cap from another green bottle.

Still mumbling to himself, waxing maudlin from the golden liquid, Cleve muttered a drunken prayer, "Yeah, Jesus, I guess I should be thankful. With this tore-up old back, I'm sure glad that they finally enacted that urban development bill. It was a real smart thing to do, putting unemployed people to work rebuilding abandoned property as homes for the homeless. And thank you Jesus, for them making me the building superintendent. And Jesus, I pray that those Republicans don't try to take all of this

away. And I sure hope that sonofabitch on Eight don't come back with a gun or something."

Finished with his evening incantations, he stumbled over to his dingy living room, burped again, and sat down with a plumph in a fraying lawn chair at the worn card table that swerved as his dining room set. Dust swirled and danced around in the setting light of the western sun. He pushed aside a pile of newspapers and grabbed his unraveled deck of Aviator playing cards, beginning to shuffle them absent-mindedly, listening to the pleasant ripple of well-handled cardboard.

The screaming from across the hall in the 408 suddenly increased in volume and velocity. The Albertsons were going into the next round. Cleve could make out the dialog: "You no good drunk bastard...," "fuckin' thieving' whore," "Get the hell out of here," "You get the hell out of here." There was more. Cleve tried to block it out of his mind as he shuffled his deck of cards.

Yeah, this was a pretty lucky deck of cards, Cleve remarked to himself quietly, ignoring the noise in the hallway. Had 'em since I was in 'Nam. Almost magical how they brought me many a winning poker hand....

A loud crash sounded out in the hallway, followed by another crash, a boom, a bang, and a third crunch, this time on his outside wall; the crashes were accompanied by grunts and muffled cries. Another avalanche of screaming in bass and alto followed.

Cleve sighed, and cut the deck of cards with the adroit skill of a professional Las Vegas dealer to reveal the multi-colored form of the Queen of Hearts. Looking at the card, he took another long swig from his next bottle and exclaimed drunkenly and loudly, "You know, Jesus, I sure wish the Queen of Hearts would pay those people a visit. They need all the Hearts they can get."

Cleve thought he might have to call the cops again. Another crash in the hallway, this time on his door, causing it to rumble and rattle almost as much as it jarred Cleve's teeth. The volley of the bass shouting had receded, however, descending in volume down the hallway where it was eventually swallowed by the ding of the elevator bell.

"Yeah, Jesus, those folks sure need all the love they can get," he repeated earnestly, glancing down again at the bright colored hues of the Queen of Hearts, holding the card between his thumb and forefinger, flipping it casually from one calloused finger to another. At least he would not have to call the police just yet.

The Queen at Hearts winked at him slowly.

Cleveland blinked heavily, rubbed his eyes with both hands, and looked at the card, which had been dropped weakly to the table. “Man, you sure are fucked up,” he exclaimed to himself.

The Queen of Hearts winked at him again.

Cleve focused and stared intently at the card in an attempt to determine whether he was seeing a rainbow colored playing card or pink elephants.

The Queen of Hearts winked a third time.

"What's going on here?" Cleve remarked spookily aloud, rising crescendo in his voice, glancing nervously over his shoulder and around the tight efficiency of his room. He pushed himself back from his makeshift coffee table, careening himself, the lawn chair, and the rickety table into a flying mélange of old newspapers, playing cards and green bottles. As he sat on his rump in a tangled heap, his tired blue eyes shifted nervously around the room.

Finally, seeing no evil specter or unknown boogeyman, he pulled himself over to his worn couch, crunching newspapers and other assorted trash together in the process. Man, I need to quit this drinking, Cleve exclaimed to himself again. He rubbed his damp forehead and eyes in an effort to dispel his visualized hallucination. His hands were trembling, his head was spinning, and his stomach was churning.

Several swallows of amber fluid later, Cleve had regained his composure. He tilted his neck back to rest on the hard back of the threadbare sofa, still breathing rather heavily, eyes closed. He burped again. The couple in 409 had started their gyrations again, rhythmic thumps beginning to bounce of the hollow walls of the east side of Cleve's apartment. Cleve sat motionless for a good dozen of minutes.

The three sharp knocks on the flimsy door of his room jarred Cleve back to reality. He did not know what time it was, but he really did not want to deal with anyone at all. He did not feel like fixing anyone's plumbing this evening, or changing their light bulbs. Hopefully it was not Mrs. Albertson wanting to cry on his shoulder again. Or maybe it was that crazy asshole from Eight wanting to shoot him. He sat there, still as a startled church mouse, ignoring the knocks. Several moments passed. The same three raps repeated themselves, thus time with a certain degree of impatience. God, it was Mrs. Albertson again, Cleve swore to himself. He sat up quietly, still ignoring the rapping on his hotel door. Maybe she would go away.

A third crescendo of beatings rattled his door, five raps this time, louder than the first two series, and with an unmistakable degree of demand and persistence. Cleve sighed and slowly struggled to his feet, righting the overturned coffee table and the slighted lawn chair, feeling the unmistakable pang in his lower back. He combed back his ruffled thinning blond-gray hair with bony fingers and very slowly shuffled over to the entrance to his abode.

He opened the door to witness a startlingly beautiful cocoa-colored woman in brightly colored wraps attempting to strike yet another set of percussions on his cheaply veneered entryway. Her high cheekbones were framed by a tightly wrapped turban of robin-egg blue; a mislaid curl of ebony hair with a strand of silver peeked from out of the corner of the blue. Her thin Roman nose was flared with the arrogant nostrils reminiscent of an Ethiopian queen, while her full lips were held tight with the hint of a possible smirk of controlled annoyance. Her sharp black eyes most definitely held an air of irritation; her finally shaped knuckles were still held poised in mid-stride as he interrupted her next collection of raps.

"Yes, can I help you?" Cleve asked with a certain annoyance of his own. He was in no mood to play usher to another intrusion from the street or entertain the latest ploys of San Antonio's working girls.

Her coal-black doll eyes met his firmly and steadfastly. "May I speak to the Reverend Doctor Cleveland Maxwell, please?" The haughtiness was severe, the tone was formal, and her air was chilly in a very official way. Maybe she was looking for someone.

"I'm Cleveland Maxwell," Cleve replied quietly. "But I am certainly no reverend or doctor. What can I do for you?"

"Bishop Maxwell, I have been asked..."

He interrupted bluntly, "Bishop? M'am, I ain't nothing but the caretaker here. If there is something regarding the administration of the building...." Her salutation had definitely rung a very strange chord in him.

It was her turn to interrupt him with a curt raising of a hand which displayed authority. "Bishop Maxwell, if you would give me the opportunity," she raised her voice and hand with emphasized syllables and a certain bit of magnitude that enhanced Cleve to purse his lips together, "I will explain the purpose of my visit. May I come in?", she demanded commandingly, motioning with a slight forward motion of her leg and an even slighter haughty jab of her chin towards the inquisitive gray head of Mrs. Gutierrez in 407, who was leaning out of her apartment and staring at them in gossipy inquisition.

Still startled into silence, Cleve stepped aside and motioned her inside with a gracious but reserved wave of his hand. She stepped gingerly inside, each step a measured motion of finesse.

"Please, have a seat." He again motioned with his bony fingers, this time towards the gnarling, beaten couch. She eyed the pile of

newspapers topped with dirty socks with some disdain. Cleve hastily moved to clear an area for her, dumping his armful of accumulated detritus unceremoniously in an available corner. She seated herself erectly on the edge of the sofa, as if the area were somehow still somewhat contaminated. There was no doubt in Cleve's mind that it still was, but it was the best he could do. Lord knows the place smelled like a rancid beer-joint.

"May I get you some coffee?" Cleve's host mode took over as he strived to make his only guest in months somewhat more comfortable.

"Thank you. That would be nice." She smile was with tight, formal pinched lips, but her eyes showed a slight softening that indicated that he may have broken the ice following their initial frosty encounter.

As Cleve hobbled to set water in the Mr. Coffee and wash a stained coffee mug, he was suddenly enthralled by the beautiful and majestic figure in his apartment. This sort of thing only happened in dreams and fantasies.

He asked in a gentle manner, "How can I be of service to you?" He almost added "Your Highness" to his query, but checked himself. But she most certainly had the air of royalty about her.

"Before I attempt to answer your question," she began with her strangely exotic accent, "Let me preface an introduction, one which will get directly to the point. As you may surely be aware, there are forces in this universe that go beyond the standard definitions of modern physics."

She paused meaningfully and glanced over at him, giving him the chance to slip in a question. "You mean like good and evil?", he asked innocuously, more as a polite conversation maker than as a serious question, and starting to wonder if he had allowed a tin-foil-helmeted person into his apartment.

She did not appear in the least annoyed by his interrogatory; in fact, it almost appeared to Cleve that she was pleased by it, given the slight shift of color in her eyes.

"Good and evil are manifestations of these forces; of that there is no doubt," she continued, nodding to herself. Her strange English accent was extremely correct, formal, refined, and her tone of voice had developed a melodic, almost poetic air that Cleve found greatly relaxing and appealing. "But Good and Evil are absolute only in their relative analysis. The forces of which I speak are more, how shall I define them, like contradictory energies which oppose themselves in the dialectic manner of thesis versus antithesis. Magnetic poles, if you will; this would probably be the best way to describe it. But magnetic poles whose energies produce a new magnetic pole." She glanced over to Cleve questioningly to see if he understood, or perhaps, if he was even paying attention.

Cleve nodded seriously without lifting his head from his kitchen preparations. The dialectic thing was something he remembered from his youthful flirtations with leftist organizations; he understood the concept. But he still did not know where she was coming from. He looked up to meet her gaze, perhaps feeling the intensity. Her eyes had dropped their icy barrier and for a fleeting moment were gazing at him analytically to see if he followed her thoughts, and they revealed a wave of cool blue water and an exotic inner beauty which caused a slight flutter in Cleve's chest. She must have seen the resultant look in his eyes, for she looked away casually, maintaining her attitude of control.

"In a manner of speaking," she continued, leaning back slightly in the worn sofa, "this dialectic, which may perhaps be defined as a natural characteristic of the Universe itself, and without getting into the particulars of your quantum physics, perhaps manifests itself best in your world and dimension in a gaming fashion, a wager, of sorts, of these two opposing poles. More basically, it very mathematically manifests itself by the statistical variables of probabilities according to the most ancient civilized games of your Western Civilization: that of Chess and Playing Cards. Indeed, there may be some sort of historical correlation." She nodded to herself and again glanced up at Cleve.

“Your” world? Cleve's was getting more and more weirded out and averted his eyes as he approached her carrying a complete cookie sheet collection of coffee in the chipped coffee pot, sugar in a diner container, milk in a pint carton—Cleve had sniffed it to make sure it had not gone rancid--, two ceramic coffee mugs (one displaying the advertising for Allen-Bradley electrical products and the other chipped one emblazoned with the "I Love San Antonio" logo), and a microwave TV dinner plate arranged with a geometric pattern of townhouse crackers. The crackers were garnished ornately on the side with a marigold from his kitchen window flower box. He set it before her on the chipped Formica card table and managed to take a hefty drag from his green bottle before he sat down. Maybe he had just let some sort of insurance salesperson into his apartment.

"How delightful!" She exclaimed politely, clasping her finely manicured bronze hands together. Cleve beamed inwardly, still averting his eyes, trying to maintain his cool as building superintendent and host, but it was the impression that he had hoped to make in spite of the strange static in the air.

"You know, Miss, you do have me at a certain disadvantage. How can I help you?” he repeated. “You know my name---forgetting about that bishop stuff. But I don't know you at all. You should probably know right off the bat that I cannot afford anything you might be selling. Are you here to see about an apartment? The leasing office will open at 8 tomorrow morning…." It was his turn to look at her analytically. Her eyes met his squarely, baring no animosity, but nor did they reveal any of the cool blue ocean that he had glimpsed earlier. Her barrier was up again, but this time in a more reserved and professional manner.

"Please forgive my lack of decorum, Bishop Maxwell. I suppose that I have been too pre-occupied with my pending task. I am Amora Corazones." She shuffled in her seat to remove a black, yellow, green and red wrap from around her torso, revealing a taut, exquisitely shaped brown shoulder and arm. Her other shoulder still lay clothed in additional colorful garb. She extended the bare arm and hand to Cleve. He grasped it gently and firmly and most definitely felt a strange electrical charge.

She accepted the coffee mug from Cleve with both hands and nodded once with her thanks. Her eyes were still formal, but there was no sign of her initial chill. And she offered no further information.

Cleve poured her a mug, putting on his best table manners. They sat in silence for several minutes, sipping at the hot mugs. She reached with a bare arm for a cracker. Her skin was smooth, the brown of light mahogany. Her hands were delicate, with the slightly spatulate finger tips of a guitarist. Her nails were perfectly manicured, but not gaudy with paint: a translucent whitish gloss caused them to sparkle like quartz. She nibbled gingerly on the cracker. Cleve had instinctively placed her age at about fifty when he met her at the door, now he was inclined to cut that number in half. But even so he could not be sure. She was shrouded in a certain timelessness that he could not explain, but he knew that this was most definitely a very classy lady. Definitely not here to see an apartment.

Cleveland had been digesting the last words of her introductory discourse along with the crackers. What she had been talking about of dialectics and dimensions and gaming forces in cards and chess seemed totally bizarre to him, but then, he had had several liters of the golden liquid in the green bottles and in no position to think straight. But he knew that there were many things beyond the comprehension of the physical world that he had often pondered, and he really did not care to be agnostic about these matters. And at this point in his life he only wanted to spend more quiet moments with this strange woman in this cheap apartment. Even so, the statement of the mahogany queen concerning the gaming forces of the universes, combined with his own meager knowledge of historical materialism, finally prompted him to speak.

"These gaming forces, Ms. Amora, what can they possibly have to do with me?" Immediately Cleveland was sorry that he had

spoken. Amora Corazones looked at him with startled eyes, as if sorry that he had brought her back to the purpose of her visit. She had seemed so content there for those few minutes, almost happy that she could enjoy the peace and quiet. Now she returned to her formal business-like tone and air.

"Ah, yes, Bishop Maxwell," she sighed quietly, sitting back up on the edge of the couch and straightening up. "As I was saying. These gaming forces, as you call them, play themselves out in every imaginable form and fashion. Sometimes, by virtue of an ordinary prayer or invocation, people of your, ah, status, by virtue of their conscious deliberations, are brought into the game." She glanced quickly at Cleve, her brown eyes questioning. "Quite simply, your most recent prayer, psycho-actively enhanced by your consciousness-shifting consumption of alcohol, has made you a player in this universal game." Her eyes stayed fixed on him, gazing at him business-like, surveying his reaction.

"Ah, what prayer was that?" Cleve replied without comprehension.

"That regarding your neighbors the Albertsons."

"You mean the people across the hall?"

"Yes."

"What prayer?" Cleve repeated as his mind reeled and he leaned back in the lawn chair. All he remembered was that he had muttered something in his alcohol inspired state about wishing the Albertson's all the Hearts they needed, or something to that effect. You know, he recalled, it was about then that the Queen of Hearts in his well-worn deck of now scattered playing cards had winked at him three times. No, it was too crazy....

He stumbled out of the chair. With a clank it folded and collapsed on the floor behind him. Paying it no heed, he walked to where he had left his brown bag and raised it to his lips. He finished the warmed contents of the flask and set it down on the kitchen counter.

There was no way in the world this woman could have known that, unless the room was bugged or something. Cleve was getting a little frightened, almost paranoid by this strange unknown, wondering how They were spying on him.

"Who told you that?" Cleve snapped without animosity. "Have you been bugging my room?"

Amora appeared surprised. "Why, I just knew."

"Who are you, anyway?" Cleve's tone was now mixed and betraying notes of anguish.

"Why, I am Amora Corazones". She seemed taken aback. "I told you my name."

"B-But, who are you really?"

"Do you not know? I winked at you so that you would know." She almost pouted at his outbreak; her demeanor had been shaken and now she almost looked like a fifteen year old girl who had just broken up with her boyfriend. Nonetheless, she still retained a royal proverbial stiff upper lip.

"Y-You're the Queen of Hearts?" Cleve asked incredulously.

"That is the role I have been given." Amora Corazones replied softly and simply, looking down at the thread-worn cactus-yellow carpet, then quickly, "and I have selected you to be my Bishop of Hearts. And you should also know that by the virtue and faith of your invocations and intervention the situation regarding the Albertsons has been resolved. I have talked to Dinera Diamantes and now the Albertsons' will 'live happily ever after' as you would call it." Her rapid words were proud, unashamed, confident, and fully believing what she said.

Cleve's head began spinning so rapidly that he had to grasp the edge of the kitchen counter to keep his hold on concrete reality as he knew it so as to avoid hurling into the kitchen sink.

Finally he stumbled over to a high shelf above the kitchen sink and reached and grasped for a mass of purple velvet cloth. He

pulled the oval shaped bottle from the tight knittings of the velvet bag and unscrewed the cap from the bottle. With his other hand he piled ice cubes from his old refrigerator into a jelly glass. He poured the contents of the oval bottle to fill the jelly glass to mid capacity, taking a stiff draught directly from the bottle in the process. It was time for some serious self-medicating.

Without a word, and without bothering to pick up the collapsed lawn chair, he plopped himself down on the opposite end of the couch from Amora Corazones, on top of additional magazines and yellowed newspapers. He took another hefty swig from his glass.

They sat in silence for several more minutes. Finally Amora asked curiously and innocently, "What is that you are imbibing?"

Cleve looked at her, halfway startled, remembering that she was there. His host mode again took hold. In spite of her incredulous testimony, he nonetheless appreciated her being there. He never had received company so exquisite in his life, and he was just about drunk enough to play along. "Why, it's Crown Royal, Miss Amora. Fit for a queen." His play on words made him laugh out loud.

"It is enjoyable to hear you laugh such," she remarked. She smiled at him with an honest, sincere, toothy smile, a wide mouthful of sparkling white teeth again endearing her to him. Her eyes also sparkled in genuinely friendly fashion, losing all airs of royalty. It was the first time he had seen her smile.

"Would you like a drink, Your Highness?" he asked her with his characteristic Southwestern flavor and drawl. He couldn't remember the last time he had offered a woman a drink, but he certainly was not going to miss this opportunity.

"Oh, yes, please, Bishop Maxwell. But please call me Amora." Her tone was genuinely warm as she lowered her eyes demurely but sophisticatedly to the response to the additional flutter in Cleve's chest.

"In that case, Amora, you will have to call me Cleve." Cleve was also becoming friendlier, perhaps even in a fawning, gawking sort of way.

"Agreed." She still did not look at him.

And, Cleve thought to himself, it would a gracious gentleman mode in him that would take hold firmly, not some cheap horny construction worker imitation. Based on the flutters in his chest, he didn't know if he was falling in love with someone he did not even know or if he was having a heart attack.

And if this was the Queen of Hearts, Cleve continued to himself, he just might agree to her so-called Bishop. Maybe it meant “boyfriend” where she came from. Cleve had not had a girlfriend since his second divorce. It was if he had just made a promise to himself, and without really knowing why. Maybe it was the booze. He almost welcomed the new role. He would play along.

He poured the liquor into a second jelly glass and handed it to her elegantly, paper towel tucked delicately around its base.

"Thank you, Bishop Cleve." Well, she was almost there.

"As I am trying to explain to you...The 'game', as you call it, is not so much a 'game' as it is a different, divergent struggle of primacy among alternative means of cerebral and intellectual theory and belief. The best way I can describe it in your mathematical terms is that of a squares on a chess board multiplied by the number of cards in a standard card deck, roughly giving an initial working probability scenario of 3456 potential and divergent confluences attempting in their own way to affect day to day events in this world every 100^{th} of a second. This of course does not factor in the number of possible moves in a game of chess multiplied by the numbers of possible poker hands that could be played at any particular moment-- An ordinary poker deck of cards, without jokers, mind you. The chessboard and pieces with the cards represent an almost exact replica of initial factors of the DNA in genetic mapping; thus we

can use the chess set and cards to actively interpolate permutations in the time space continuum. Tarot cards involves levels of understanding which are not readily available to the general practitioner, so they are of little concern to us here at this introductory level; we can achieve an interpretation of the divinatory powers of the Tarot with an ordinary deck of playing cards.

"Hence, in our given scenario, we have Christian influences, Marxist influences, Moslem influences, Judaic influences, capitalist influences, nationalist influences, Christian-socialist influences, and so on. Indeed, there are as many different influences as there are people on this planet. Some influences are merely more pronounced than others. Are you following me?"

Cleveland nodded, even though he was probably not.

"Given the mathematical probabilities of that chessboard-times-poker-deck," she again glanced up at Cleve to see if he was still listening, or at least coherent. He had had a couple more drinks after her three, but he had decided that it was his last for the time being. Her questioning eyes, confident that Cleve was still there, flashed him another sparkle of an unknown quality and returned to her entrancing monologue. The liquor had definitely loosened her tongue to where she was speaking quite garrulously but coherently.

"…gives us basically and initially a 'playing field' of totally variant 'forces' here on Earth," she continued. "Each force is essentially diametrically and geometrically opposed to every other force, somewhat akin to a balanced octagonal spheroid crystal, octahedral, if you will, much like an Egyptian pyramid reflected in an clear water surface---and indeed there are specific parallels to that ancient wave form---and each force concentrates and reflects accumulated psychic energy from its respective plane on that geometric form into the given center of the octahedral crystal, that center being that exact point in what you may call the time space continuum. Are you still with, Bishop Cleve? I realize that some of this may be rather obtuse."

Cleve nodded again. She had called him "Bishop" again. Oh well, Cleve sighed to himself, guessing that he shouldn't assume anything. She was so engrossed in her explanation that she didn't even look up this time, either. But Cleve was still following here every word with a manner he could only describe as uncanny.

"The concept is akin to that expressed in many science fiction works, if you are a science fiction aficionado, but by no means is science fiction anything but a very, very rough synotype. And by all means there is not the amount of violence expressed therein." She rolled her nose upwards in a sniffing, sad sort of way. "The forces involved are much more complex than that. Even the octahedral model I have cited is very elementary, based on more, how shall I state it, 'primitive' models in the frequency spectrums of human consciousness. A more accurate concept would be that of an infinite time, infinite space, perfectly spheroid crystal, with each and every tangent point on that spherical plane capable of being focused upon a crystal center which describes itself as the Present at a given time-space-consciousness coordinate. The individual mind determines that coordinate. The forces opposed cannot even really be called 'evil', as you may describe the term--- except in isolated, random instances---. The Forces involved are perhaps better defined as physical stresses upon a material configuration, but then even this description is fallacious, indeed, given the illusory nature of matter. Perhaps it shall suffice to say that it is very, very difficult to describe these concepts in mere words.

Cleve was pretty sure that he had lost the thread of thought at that point, but he kept nodding.

"Evil, as you may define it, has been abolished. Even the random instances of it are being reduced; and sometimes what one deems as evil is merely a question of perspective. It is now a question of, how shall I state it, which definition or interpretation of 'good' prevails. The determination of that particular 'good' will determine which particular 'dimension' the world in which, say, the Albertsons' reside---will maintain. Your quiet prayer this evening, in the sense that it was a focused psychic effort, has

determined a particular course of action. Your altered state of consciousness from your liquid, combined with your genuinely sincere prayer-form has affected physical reality and effected physical change.

“Most of this analysis would have been delayed for many decades without the development of The Algorithm, developed by a software engineer from Peoria, Illinois, in the Nineteen-Nineties.

Cleve continued nodding, somberly, arms crossed on his knees, leaning forward and listening intently, but his head whirled and he had definitely lost the chain of thought.

“Wait a sec--am I to assume that this algorithm has not been invented yet?” He attempted a recovery of the exchange. He didn't know if it was the Amora's captivating voice with its exotic accent, the alcohol, or the incredulous nature of what Amora had just told him, but he most certainly was overwhelmed by her dazzling monologue.

“Ah, yes. You are correct. Sometimes I must remember where I am in the Continuum,” she replied.

Cleveland felt compelled to venture a question. The Continuum? Cleve again wondered if he had let a nut-case into his home. "But where do I fit in in all of this?" he ventured.

She tossed back here perfectly sculptured chin and giggled in a totally disarming girlish manner. "My dear Cleve, either I have been enjoying myself too much in your company or you have not comprehended."

She leaned forward and shifted gracefully in her seat with one gentle motion to remove another green, red, and yellow linen wrap from around her slender torso to reveal a second bare, tanned shoulder and arm, her several golden bracelets on her wrists jingling like tiny bells, each sound fully harmonic and musical, like miniature wind chimes. A third equally colorful cloth wrapped itself around her upper body, giving her the air of a wise but sad Nubian noble woman. She leaned towards him with an elbow on each knee and fingers interlaced gracefully, a glimpse of soft, firm glowing mahogany breasts revealing their uppermost cleavage, and stared at Cleveland earnestly with almost pleading open sparkling brown eyes. "How can I say this? I have chosen you to be my Bishop".

Lost for a moment in her wide, soul searching eyes, Cleve could not even begin to explain the feelings in his chest and heart. He felt every bit of his own soul rise to meet her eyes, feeling much like the ice cubes in his Crown Royal, melting in the warm pool of her gaze. There was no doubt to him that here in her eyes was an unknown force of pure love which transcended the universe. Maybe this Amora chick was an angel or something. Maybe she was an alien. Maybe she was a witch. Maybe she was a mental patient. Or maybe she was a demon….

Amora coughed into her fist and spoke, jarring him back to semi-sobriety. "Cleve, might I have another Crowned Royal, please. It is indeed a very enjoyable substance." Her noblesse oblige took hold in a gracious and friendly manner, but she did not make any lengthy eye contact.

Cleve felt slightly embarrassed. He most certainly did not want any crude thoughts to interfere with this evening. "Why, most certainly, Miss Amora." He arose quickly, jerkily, thankful for the interruption, and poured her another jelly glass concoction of the liquor.

From his kitchen escape Cleve called out to the living room, "And how was I chosen for this honor, or task, Amora?" His tone had also become friendly in a non-committal way. Wiping his hands on a tattered washcloth, he reached out to his window flower pot and harvested a red rose.

"Well, quite candidly, the former Bishop of Hearts was captured by the Queen of White Clubs in a wild gambit conducted in the Moslem regions of Bosnia. But having achieved a 'chess piece' by the entrepreneurial spirit of one of our 'pawns', we had elected to select a Bishop, as opposed to another Queen, of which there are too many. I personally made the decision of your individual

selection after reviewing the list of potential nominees. Your selective prayer at the time, immediately following the capture, synchronistically convinced me of your qualifications. And after this personal interview, I am again convinced of my decision to select you as my new Bishop." She looked up and over to Cleve, who was approaching from the kitchen with replenished Crown Royals for the both of them, a paper towel draped elegantly on the sleeve of his worn khaki work shirt. Her eyes opened with an honest smile.

As he set the tray down on the coffee table in front of Amora, he stated, " Amora, your Royal Highness, Ma'am, I am indeed honored by your gentle visit and your gentle nature. Let me assure you that chivalry is not dead, even while it may be a little sick. If thou requesteth that I be thy Bishop, and accepting you now as my Queen, it is a great honor and with great pleasure I accept the nomination of your Bishop to Black Square, White Hearts, of this particular Time-Space-Dimensional Continuum." The liquor had indeed released his inner bard, even if it sounded totally corny; he was drunk enough at the moment to relish his new role.

Amora clapped her hands together and laughed. "My dear Cleve, that was very nice," she exclaimed. Cleve was sure that he caught a reddish blush upon her cheeks, even with his head bowed.

"That is most remarkable, dear Cleve. I continue to be astonished by you. But I shall make this official." She again giggled like a tickled school girl for several seconds. The Crown Royal was having its desired results on her as well. Taking the marigold off the tray, she tapped him lightly on both shoulders with it and exclaimed, "By the powers invested in me by the Bonnie Dew, and solidifying it with the Love Force of the Holy Universe, I declare you, Cleveland Maxwell, to be my Bishop, with all the powers and assigns thereof." She then burped quietly.

"Thank you, Amora," Cleve replied humbly and probably a little flattered by the attention. "But might I ask you a question....On this Bishop thing...do I need to fill out a W-4 or something"?

"So, Cleve, you must understand....By the time I realized that I had been selected to be the umpteenth Queen of Hearts---do you realize how many of the previous Queen of Hearts had been burned at the stake?---." Her slim nostrils flared in a brief exclamation of righteous anger. "Thirteen. Thirteen women burned to death because of the illogic of an irrational male-dominated social structure.---I knew that if I undertook the project I would have to do the very best of the jobs that I could do." She again glanced over at Cleve to see if he was still paying attention.

Cleve was. He knew that concept of quality work. He had been a Union pipefitter at a microchip plant for 22 years. Only the best could hold that job, but that was before corporate down-sizing, outsourcing to China, and two work-related ruptured disks had reduced him to a disabled statistic.

Satisfied that she still held his attention, she continued in an unrelated tangent, "This element alcohol in this Crowned Royal is indeed a most stimulating ingredient. I suspect it could be addicting...."

Cleve had to grin. How many times had he sat in front of a bottle with the weird idea that it would bring him the feelings he was experiencing now without it? But he was really growing weary of those lonesome drunks and painful hangovers. He was getting tired of being tired. He was ready for a good change. Besides, that had been one of his major prayers.

"The most tenuous part of this 'game'," Amora continued, "Is that there are so many permutations. As a craftsman, you most certainly recognize the fact of unexpected job contingencies. Within your craft and parameters, it is one thing, but within the parameters of an eternal, fluid, multi-dimensional universe, you must be able to recognize mathematically that the permutations of this universe are infinite. One's responsibilities and actions in

a position such as mine are indeed a gamble. Every decision I make in my current role as a powerful member of the team is a gamble, a play in the game, an uncertainty. I have to be a gambler, a speculator, almost a mere stockbroker, a mathematician. There are an infinite number of variant permutations based on the spherical nature of the indefinite number of opposing lines of force." Her previously unblemished brow had crinkled into lines of force of their own.

"I say opposing," She continued. "Again, they oppose each other on the level of pure random chance. The levels I outlined earlier are the most obvious forms, forms defined by the basic outlay of the chess and poker game. In your psycho-physiological framework, the chess game represents the left brain, studied analytical approach to a question, while the right brain is represented by the intuitive, spontaneous approach of a good poker bet. Are you following me, Bishop C?"

Cleve nodded.

"So getting back to my earlier descriptions of the Wild Reds Club gambit against the White Heart expedition...By the way, while I think of it, the name of the Heart's White Pawn that achieved 'The Other Side' in chess which in effect influenced my decision to choose you as the next Bishop of Hearts was a gentleman named Something Tesla. He wanted me to convey some of his notes to my selection of his designated replacement. I will forward them to you at a later time....In any event the Wild Reds Gambit in Bosnia only cut their own *raison d'etres.* By their continued acts of organized hate they have destroyed themselves. Love will win, of that there is no doubt. It is merely a question of time before the total seeding of that love within the individual hearts and souls of men and women will be accomplished. I have chosen you to seed that Love, Bishop Cleve,"

She leaned back semi-sensually on the worn sofa, uncrossed her legs, and with one graceful circular movement unpeeled the robin-egg blue wrap from her head. A wash of thick silky deep-brown hair streaked randomly with iridescent strands of gold, copper, and silver lines of light fell with a soft spray across her slender shoulders to the center of her multi-colored body wrap. She ran her fingers thru it several times, shaking her head gently to clear her inebriated state.

Finally the Queen of Hearts spoke, slowly, measuredly, gently but firmly. "Cleve, my dear friend, I stand resolutely behind my decision to name you as my bishop. Your heart is true. As one of my prerogatives in my position, I am bestowing upon you my blessing for your future endeavors as a writer, a skill which you will find will come easily and with great richness." She looked at him squarely in the eyes with dark serious mysterious intent and motioned in the air with her right hand in a wave that was somewhat akin to a Catholic sign of the cross.

Cleve was staring at the worn toes of his work boots, listening to every word with studious reverence. "I understand, Amora, and I thank you for this gentle blessing. I will strive to do my best in this endeavor for your sake and mine." It still sounded corny, but what the heck.

"There is another thing, dearest Cleve," she continued. "I have two very dear friends in my service, Michael and Jessica Quill. I suppose that they can fairly be called Rooks of Hearts in this scenario. While their movements are more linear, they are sometimes in need of critical support and assistance. If they contact you, I ask that you give them every possible bit of assistance that you can humanly muster. Your actions play into a larger scale model involving a quantum mode to strike true world peace into the hearts and minds of this time frame; every potential action along this line will serve a wider purpose of this 'game'. You have never meet them, but your efforts will be understood by them and they shall consider you as a spiritual ally. Part of your pending task is to transcribe their exploits for the world to read. Please help them as much as you can. As a Bishop, you can move in non-linear, non-spatial dimensions which they will critically need. You will be, how shall I put it, their Guardian Angel of sorts. Again, please help them at all times. You will

know when and how to do it, as it is in my job description to make this knowledge known to you."

Cleve nodded seriously.

"And, while I think of it, never raise the bet when holding three sixes. It is the hand which has been dealt, and it is better to hold or fold than to attempt to bluff into parameters which will not be successful. While the manifestations of this so-called 'Mark of the Beast' are mostly left to mythology, there still remains this intrinsic detail with that particular poker hand which I must parlay to you. Please make a note of it.

Cleve again nodded, his arms folded on his knees as he listened in earnest, even if his head was slightly nodding to one side. “Should I be writing this down?” he ventured.

"Also while I think of it. Always raise with a Full House, especially if said Full House consists of Aces and Queens. Always. While it sounds like a common sense bet in the first place, it is important that one not be bluffed out of it. Do you understand Cleve?" She again glanced at him with serious scientific eyes.

Cleve nodded earnestly a third time.

"In the forthcoming weeks, more specifically on April 20 on a soon to be selected year, you are to be the scheduled speaker at the John E. W. Keely conference in Boulder, Colorado. The scheduled topic is that of synchronicity, in which you will know exactly what to say, as the spirit of your research will move you. That research will be that which is immediately ascertainable, and which you shall know of the consequences."

"Amora, my friend, without trying to sound too base about this, how I am going to afford a trip to Boulder, Colorado and motel rooms, and meals. I don't mean to sound like a cad, but I simply don't have that type of money....I've been out of work for eight years now."

Amora threw back her head and laughed. “Bishop Cleve, how could I be so forgetful? I simply have been enjoying myself too much in your company, forgetting my own duties in establishing you here as my Bishop. Please forgive my negligence. And please make note of the following numbers: l3-l7-32-38-41-47. These are the winning numbers to this Wednesday's drawing of 4 million dollars for the Texas lottery. Never you mind how these results were acquired---there are certain aspects of the time-space continuum which you will learn in time---but understand that they will provide you with the financial means to achieve the work which you will need to do under my, how shall I say it, employ."

“Only 4 million?” Cleve ventured.

It was a mighty stern look that Amora shot his way.

It was Cleve's turn to laugh heartily in quick recovery from his gaffe. "Why, that's the best solution to winning the Lotto that I have ever heard, Amora. And I couldn't think of a better boss. You are indeed my Lady Luck."

Amora beamed brightly, her grinning mouthful of teeth reaching from ear to ear. "My dear Bishop Cleve, I will endeavor to be your Lady Luck and your Muse for our collective endeavors. All you have to do is invoke my name softly, and I shall be there. I give you my Blessing towards this endeavor".

A screeching sound of squealing tires, followed by a loud crash from the streets below, interrupted their quiet dialog. A slamming of a car door and angry shouts followed. Cleve and Amora could not make out the words, but they both rushed in unison to the window of the living room of the efficiency. Below them on North Flores a collision of a late model pickup and an older Oldsmobile was resulting into a violent confrontation. Three white youths in George Strait-styled black cowboy hats had emerged from the truck to surround the middle-aged Hispanic man and woman in the Olds.

From the fourth floor of Cleve's apartment, Cleve and Amora could hear the resulting argument. "You dumb fuckin' meskin, you wrecked my Dad's truck...I'm gonna whip your fuckin' ass..." The burly adolescent had reached inside the vehicle attempting to grab the older man. One of the other teens had attempted to enter from the passenger side of the car, but the matronly woman had wisely locked the doors. He began to beat on the window violently with a beer can as the third youth urinated over the back bumper of the car. The older couple began screaming for help.

"Cleve, they are calling for help. You must do something." Amora had grabbed his elbow apprehensively and pushed her lithe frame closer to him, as if in security.

"Amora, what can I do? I guess I better call the cops." He turned from the window to rush from the room to the pay phone by the elevator.

She held his arm even more tightly. "No," she said firmly but softly. "You must use your new methods. There is no time to call the police."

Cleve looked at her puzzled, tilting his head in an inquisitive manner. Her eyes firmly locked into his in a stern, imploring manner, but Cleve understood their meaning. He broke from her rigid grasp on his arm and rushed to the floor of his apartment, quickly gathering his scattered deck of playing cards into a more malleable form. From below on the street he could hear the crashing of glass and screams of pain.

"Sweet Jesus, I may be crazy and I may be drunk, but I certainly hope there is some sort of method to this madness," he said silently under his breath. "Here goes."

Cleve had squared up the deck of cards and was shuffling them together in his poker playing style.

"Cleve, there is no time to shuffle." Amora said exasperatedly to him. "They have been shuffled by the 52 card pickup. Just cut the deck." Amora was still looking outside, one hand on the wooden window sill and the other turned towards Cleve and hanging in mid-air as if suspended by strings.

Cleve nodded to himself and repeated in a whisper, "Here goes."

He cut the deck deftly and turned up the Six of Clubs. Amora glanced over to it as he showed it to her as a student would show an assumed answer on a test.

"Thank the Bonny Dew. Bishop Maxwell, you indeed have the touch." She sighed and calmly turned to look out the window.

From out of nowhere and from all sides three patrol cars of the San Antonio Police Department had emerged to surround the confrontation on North Flores. Two patrol officers had emerged from each vehicle to quickly break up the strife, their night sticks drawn and ready. The three youths attempted an aggressive drunken defense against this arrival of the cavalry, but were quickly subdued, handcuffed, and unceremoniously ushered into the swirling red and blue lights of the waiting squad cars.

Amora sighed again and turned away from the window, a broad smile framing the tired eyes on her face. She sat delicately on the wooden sill, stretched her long legs in front of her and propped her tawny hands on the sill next to her. She looked at Cleve in an extremely strange manner. Cleve was abashed as he looked at her from his crouched position on the funky carpet floor. He busied himself straightening the deck of cards, conscious of her gaze on the back of his neck.

Finally she spoke. "My dear Bishop Cleve, I have three questions for you. First of all, have you a chess set? Secondly, where on earth have you acquired the Knack? And third, might I have another glass of your amber liquid?

Amora was laughing uncontrollably, tears running down her high cheeks from pure glee. Her hair of glossy black, with its strands of gold, silver, and copper, was completely tousled, collective folds of it falling into her eyes. She had melted into a pool of

glowing mirth on Cleve's old sofa. Finally she came to a giggling stop. "These Aggies you describe are quite a humorous people."

Cleve chuckled, pleased at his joke-telling techniques. "Yes, Amora, they sure are. They are indeed the funniest people I know."

"You know, Cleve, I am more and more convinced that the effects of a good healthy laughter engage an energy form which the stodgy eggheads at HOMEBASE simply refuse to acknowledge. Had the energy generated by our collective laughter been applied to a millivolt meter, I am sure that it could have provided the necessary electro-magnetic force necessary to operate an electrical relay, one designed to operate towards a determined end. It is sad that even within our collective ranks we must struggle to convince the reticent, conservative mind." She grew solemn for a moment, making halfhearted attempts to straighten her hair with her fingers; failing at that, she pulled her form-fitting, multi-colored sarong-styled wrap back to a more respectable location to her knees from where it had drifted to a mid-point on her firm brown thighs, finally busting forth with laughter again.

"My friend Cleve," she finally continued more seriously and with a slight slur, "I will continue to explore this healing power of laughter and determine how we can apply these innovative electrical ideas to our goals. For instance, I know that, I just know that," her words were emphatic as she wagged a slender index figure in front of herself explicitly, her deep brown eyes crossing slightly, "we could apply them to this scenario on this chessboard. As I have mentioned, I have arranged the pieces to reflect the current situation in the Balkans. A laughter induced mood, complete with the generative energy levels of confidence, optimism and a little creative imagination could..."

Her voice trailed off as she stared at the magnetic pieces on the miniature chess set that laid open between them on the couch. So intent was her gaze that Cleve did not dare interrupt and sat there quietly, staring into the half-filled remnants of his jelly glass. The moments trailed on, and a silent mood enveloped them that seemed almost unnatural. The streets below and the hotel within had dimmed into stillness. Even the old refrigerator in the apartment had quelled its humming to pay attention to the thought-filled atmosphere of the tiny apartment. Amora's soft, frozen gaze was burning into the chess board. Looking up at the tangent angle of her eyes Cleve could almost swear he could almost smell the odor of melting plastic.

Finally she spoke softly, almost in a whisper, so softly that Cleve had to lean forward to catch her delicate words. "But of course," she murmured emphatically, more to herself than to Cleve. "But of course. How could I not have seen it earlier?"

She deftly reached over to the chess board and lifted a piece with the quick movement of a glossy fingernail. "But of course. How silly I must be. Queen's Bishop to King's Knight Four. Queen's Bishop to King's Knight Four."

Her lighted stare had turned off as if by a switch and she turned her head to look at him with a bright, happy look of one that had just successfully completed a crossword puzzle.

"My sweet Bishop, how could I have not seen this?”

Cleve drained the last of his glass and looked at her quizzically.

She raised her hand in her authoritative manner. "Please excuse me for a moment. I need to register this move." She delved into a hidden pocket of her emblazoned sarong to remove what looked like a simple pocket calculator. She begin punching buttons on the contraption with deft, furious movements. With her last register a beep emitted from the device. She looked at the display one last time and sighed, and placed the strange calculator-like back within its hidden folds.

Meanwhile, Cleve had been looking intently at the magnetic chessboard which had fallen on the floor. The magnets had held all the pieces in their respective places.

Finally he spoke. "Amora, am I to assume that I am the white Bishop on this chess board?"

"Why, yes, allegorically, of course." She had removed a hairbrush from another hidden pocket and was in the process of untangling silky knots from her glossy mane. She tilted her head back and closed her eyes, magenta lips slightly parted, as she brushed with sweeping, gentle strokes.

"Well, if that's the case, it looks like to me that I am going to be captured by this black rook over here. That would seem to be the most logical move for Black."

"Bishop Maxwell, you need not concern yourself with things that do not concern you. The move is engendered to render a maximum enforcing impact on the opposing side." Her voice had almost returned to its haughty quality, which caused Cleve to look at her curiously in mild surprise. She continued to brush her hair.

"I understand that part of it, Amora. My concern is the transformation of this move into real life. If I am being used for bait, does that mean that my impending capture will translate somehow to a personal problem for me? Do I have to expect armed thugs busting into this room and shooting me dead?"

"I doubt that any response on the part of Black will take that form. And I doubt that Black will even attempt your capture. The consequences of my move would guarantee a checkmate on the part of White. The foci of the impending contest involves with it the implications of solving an imminent problem of global potential with one simple calculated gamble. I have taken that gambit. There is no need to concern yourself with any implications of my action."

"Amora, I'm not messing with you. I'm not questioning your motives, please understand that. And also please understand that I am new at all of this. But what if they do make that move? What happens to me?" He was looking at her intently now with almost anxious eyes.

She had replaced the golden-handled hairbrush within the hidden folds of her sarong, but she still averted his gaze. "Well, unfortunately, checkmate will be delayed by several more moves, but it is just a question of time before the forces of Peace and Love will win. The process of Time is on our side."

"But if they do make that move, what will happen to me in this real life here that I live and breathe? Surely you must understand my concern, Amora. How will this affect me in this here and now?"

She finally turned and looked him squarely, her deep black eyes piercing him with a sad, panged look that sent a shudder running through him. "I do not know, my dear Cleve. I simply do not know. I had to do what I had to do. I hope you will understand," she said softly, almost in a whisper. She turned her eyes to the floor.

Cleve turned from her and stared at his empty glass. The melting ice cubes that had looked like diamonds had suddenly lost their cosmic power, melted down by forces beyond their control. He arose abruptly from the couch and stumbled into the kitchenette. There he fumbled absent-mindedly among the dishes while debating within himself whether to pour himself another. He fumbled in his shirt pocket for his cigarettes, fingers trembling while he fired up the Bic lighter.

"I don't know anything anymore, Amora. I'm just a disabled pipefitter who would love to work but my back won't let me. I don't know anything. You've come here tonight out of the blue with strange stories of chess games and poker hands and I can candidly admit that I have greatly enjoyed your company, but I still don't know anything."

Amora had replaced her blue turban and was wrapping herself with her colorful shawls. She was getting ready to leave.

"There is but One Universe, Cleve, even while there are infinite multi-verses. Some of it moves in different frequencies than yours, but there is but One. You must understand this. There is

but One Universe. In spite of everything you may be thinking, you are on the one track for a proper ethical global, universal perspective. Please understand this when I tell you."

"Amora, I was almost ready to believe anything you said till I learned that I was no more than a worm on a fish hook."

Amora backed several steps closer to the door, her arms crossed. Finally she spoke softly. "Bishop Cleve, there are certain things that are beyond your comprehension, even beyond mine. I have been entrusted to make certain decisions by powers beyond your knowledge. These decisions have apparently affected you in a way which I cannot explain. The only thing I can ask of you is to trust me."

"Whatever." Cleve's response was acidic.

Amora threw up her hands in an exasperated fashion, and then turned away, opened the door, and stood at the threshold. "Cleve, my dear friend, I shall be in touch", she said softly. "Please remember how to get in touch with me if you need me." She quietly closed the door behind her.

Cleve shrugged indifferently and poured himself the last entrails of the green bottle.

The sounds of the couple in 409 again began thumping rhythmically against the thin sheetrock walls.

TRANSCRIPT OF LECTURE OF DR. CLEVELAND MAXWELL, G.E.D., BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL KEELY CONFERENCE, APRIL 20, 1992, BOULDER, COLORADO.

Dr. Maxwell: "Dear Friends and Colleagues, it is indeed an immense honor and indeed a tremendous pleasure for me to be invited here to address such a prestigious body. My work over the years, especially at the Rhine Institute at Duke University, has permitted me to be in contact with some of you, but this is the first time I have had the opportunity to actually stand before this distinguished body with the honor of being able to address you concerning some of the many issues and questions that have distinguished the Keely Society's work throughout the years in the field of psychic research and the investigations of the paranormal.

"My talk today would like to specifically address the issue of synchronicities -- those "meaningful coincidences" so adeptly brought to the attention of the scientific community by the great Carl Gustav Jung---and the researches of the San Saba Archive and Research Institute concerning the same subject. Jung is the first psychoanalyst to attempt to make the bridge between mind and matter; his paramount work has served as an example to many other great thinkers on the subject.

"While there are great examples of synchronistic evidence around the world, there is little scientific information of where these synchronicities come from, how they develop within the human psyche, and most importantly, what their connection to the physical world is. All of us have had those spooky instances when something unexplainable occurs which we cannot put a finger on -- those unexplained cases of ESP -- knowing who is on the other end of the phone when it rings, feeling something that is about to happen that in effect does happen just as we felt it, having those strange coincidences and deja-vu's occur when there is no rational explanation for them.

"Without going into detail about the numerous synchronicities that occur every day, I would like to relate one of my favorites, quoted from Jung's *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*:

> A certain M. Deschamps, when a boy in Orleans, was once given a piece of plum pudding by a M. de Fortgibu. Ten years later he discovered another plum pudding in a Paris restaurant, and asked if he could have a piece. It turned out, however, that the plum-pudding was already ordered---by M. de Fortgibu. Many years afterwards M. Deschamps was invited to partake of a plum pudding as a special rarity. While he was eating it he remarked that the only thing lacking was M. de Fortgibu. At that moment the door opened and an old, old man in the last stages of disorientation walked in: M. de Fortgibu, who had got hold of the wrong address and burst in on the party by mistake.

"As I have mentioned, Dr. Jung opened the door to a new dimension, so to speak, when he began his study into this phenomenon. Many renowned writers and thinkers from that time have delved into the subject: Ira Progoff, Robert Anton Wilson, Arthur Koestler, David Peat, Alan Vaughan, and many others. Robert Anton Wilson's speculation on the synchronicity of the number "23" is especially interesting, and without any further elaboration of this point for the reasons of our own time limitations at this seminar, I will speculate that the '23' phenomenon may have a strange genetic link -- that the number 23 is directly and yet still inexplicably linked to the 23 male and 23 female chromosomes that make up the genetic DNA make-up of each individual, and that somehow these chromosomal correlations could be the acausal source of the predominance of the number 23 in synchronistic happenings.

"I will also further venture to speculate that our DNA has within its framework radio frequency receptors and transmitters which may account for any of the unexplained paranormal phenomena we experience, and that synchronicity may indeed be a factor of this unconscious electro-magnetic field.

"This genetic connection is further collaborated by Dr. Martin Schonberger and Johnson F. Yan in their separate studies of the correlations between the Chinese I Ching and the structure of the human DNA. There indeed seems to be a hidden link between the synchronicity we experience and our genetic make-up. Further exploration into this connection is warranted.

"But indeed it is upon this hidden link that we have dedicated ourselves in our own respective study, and we have embarked upon it with as much zeal as those erstwhile explorers of the Antarctic Continent.

"Yes, Ma'am, I see your hand waving at me there with an obvious question, and I must apologetically ask you to hold that thought and question until the end of my remarks, because I am seriously afraid of losing my own chain of thought if I am interrupted. Thank you, ma'am, I ask your indulgence; please make a note of your question and rest assured that I will see to it that you will be the first person I call on at the conclusion of my remarks.

"I assume that all of you have an essential background knowledge into most of this information on synchronicities, so I will not take up your precious time nor the precious time of this seminar by repeating known material, and will instead get to the meat of my talk: Robert Anton Wilson has suggested, Ira Progoff has intimated, and Combs and Holland have explicitly stated, that the more mental concentration and mental energy one devotes to synchronicities, the more they seem inclined to occur. In my own personal playing with the subject, I indeed found this to be true. When I focused my mind on it, for example, I would see "23's" everywhere; I would find myself bumping into people I had thought about in the past day or so; I would find certain passages of dreams being played out in my waking life.

Based on these strange considerations on my part, I therefore undertook to investigate, along with my colleagues at the San

Saba Archive and Research Institute, just how far this notion could be taken. This became the premise of our scientific study: We were going to determine the results of an upper limit of concentration on synchronicities. The group of us, along with a number of willing social acquaintances, graduate students, and volunteers, would endeavor to see how far this assumption could approach physical, material reality if and when we would spend as much of a waking day as possible concentrating on synchronicities, coincidences, the number 23, plum-pudding, and more synchronicities. We were going to mentally concentrate on the issue and record what would occur.

"Given the acausal nature of the phenomenon, we realized that in order for our experiment to be most successful, we would have to use causal and acausal methods of analysis. For, how could a causal, rationalistic, empirical form of thinking, such as is the Scientific Method, correctly explain, interpret, or analyze an acausal phenomenon which seems to transcend both space and time without any seemingly 'logical' process? We therefore decided to use as our main means of analysis, in addition to our human minds---which by its very hemispheric nature of left and right brain incorporates many acausal precepts---such approaches to the phenomenon as that which avoid causal approach and causal methods of thinking and understanding.

"To that end, we utilized the I Ching and the Tarot. These 'divinatory interlocks', as I have called them, provided valuable resources in adding data to our research. Our complete detailed report will be published shortly, but be it suffice to say that when we repeatedly tossed three pennies for the interpolation of the I Ching with the posed question of "Do synchronicities affect time travel?" we repeatedly came up with the same I Ching hexagram, or one closely related to it in terms of content. This in itself was a fairly interesting synchronistic development. By using the I Ching and the Tarot, along with the innate, focused, and under-developed powers of the mind that exist in every one of us, and which can be enhanced by such brain devices as described in Michael Hutchison's *Mega Brain*, we decided to saturate the mind with an obsession of synchronicities. We pushed the enhancement of thinking towards synchronicities with every waking hour -- and sleeping hours as well -- on our volunteer participants.

"I will also mention that in order to focus this intense concentration upon synchronicities, the research team all exercised many of the similar techniques of transcendental meditation, especially deep-breathing exercises and yoga techniques, which would allow us to achieve that essential alpha-wave brain pattern that would resonate more harmonically with the earth frequency of 7.83 hertz. This allowed us to achieve, how shall I describe it most simply, that state of 'cosmic consciousness'. We also approached the entire experiment not only seeing if synchronicities would increase upon our intense concentration, but also with the *hopeful expectation* that the periodicity of the synchronicities would increase the more we wanted them to increase, and the more we wanted to them to increase collectively as a group, not just individually.

"Our results were phenomenal, more than we had expected to obtain. Periodicity of the synchs *did* increase as just outlined, and, yes, there most certainly appeared to be a larger harmonic resonance as it appeared that we were approaching a collective consciousness.

"Among our participants our results seemed pretty uniform. Universally our results confirmed the same basic effects. First, all of our volunteers from the psychology and other departments of Central Texas College in Copperas Cove experienced three distinct sequential conditions. The first Effect, which I will call the Nape Effect, was the distinct physical sensation of the hairs rising on the back of one's neck, much like the feeling one gets when one feels a fright or 'spookiness.' All of my colleagues and I concurred that this physical phenomenon was definitely electromagnetic in nature, just as one experiences during severe ionic disturbances such as electrical storms; this hypothesis was confirmed by the voltage influences on our microvolt meters and electro-encephalographic equipment. Let me mention here that

we used the most updated and sensitive model of Livanov's toposcope with its over 65 electrode connections.

"The Second Effect I will identify as Homogenization. Essentially this describes the feeling that has been described by certain creative writing professors as Gabrielle Lusser Rico as the 'trial web shift', and in essence defines the hemispheric shift of the brain, from the 'left' brain cognitive and dominant side to the 'right' brain intuitive and creative side of the mind. This feeling was occasionally accompanied by a spatial and time disorientation and was in certain cases accompanied by feelings of nausea.

"And our Third Effect, one which I will describe as the "Muse Effect", was also distinctly felt by all of our participants, and was basically described, by male and female respondents alike, as having the feeling that someone was looking over one's shoulder, or just out of one's range of vision, and more specifically, that that 'someone' was a young and beautiful woman. Hence the description of a 'muse' which we have ascribed to it.

"I can see several hands in the audience waving at me in almost desperate fashion. I really would like to finish this presentation before I delved into any questions, but given the almost anxious nature of some of you, I will take one question right now. Yes, sir.

"Dr. Maxwell, did you and your team actually hook up any sort of electro-encephalogram or other devices to determine brain patterns during these experiments?"

"Yes, sir, we did, as I have mentioned, and I will elaborate on this in a moment. I'm sorry, I again beg the indulgence of all of you, but I really feel that I must finish this presentation before I get distracted by any other questions. I hope that none of you will feel that I am being totally pedantic about this, but in reality, I'm very seriously liable to totally lose my concentration and just want to go to a local drinking establishment to try and recoup my thoughts. Please forgive me.

"But, yes, sir, to answer your question, not only did we make use of the maximum numbers of brain and mind enhancing machines that we could possibly do, we at all times recorded, through electro-encephalograms, electro-cardiograms, and other cranial hook-ups to determine brain wave patterns and so forth, so as to have an exact reading of the brain at any and all times, so that we would be able to put together all our readings to determine if there were any common threads or resonant patterns. In fact, we carried the hook-ups several steps further; we attached meters to the medulla, the corpus coliseum, several locations of the cerebral cortex in the right and left hemispheres, the thallium, hypothalamus and pituitary glands, and all the centers ascribed to the various senses, to name a few. And, I might add, we had the most impressive results when the respective brain was pulsing at the alpha-state level, roughly between 7 to 12 cycles per second.

"Anyway, to return to the Third Effect we have noted, that of The Muse, and I thank you, sir, for your question as it were seems to be exactly related to what I am about to get into -- which one might even call a synchronicity in and of itself. Ladies and gentlemen, you are beginning to see just how easily synchronicities occur the more one thinks and studies about them. But in the case of the Muse Effect, before the precise moment our volunteers experienced the Muse, that feeling of having a presence looking over one's shoulder, there appeared on our printed readout of brain impulses a "blip" from the right brain cerebral cortex region. There was a distinct correlation between the blip and the experiencing of The Muse: It was almost as if the mind had created the "Muse" from its concentrations on synchronicities, or that The Muse herself had influenced the operation of the machinery, if one was given towards that mode of thinking. There was that distinct correlation between consciousness and matter. We considered both options.

Given the acausal nature of the subject matter we were dealing with, we most definitely considered the possibility that the Muse may have appeared first -- "called forth," if I may use the term, or perhaps "conjured," if you will, by the concentrations on synchronistic material, and perhaps the blip was perhaps actually

caused after the appearance of the Muse by the reaction of the brain to the appearance of the phenomenon. The entire experience suggested that perhaps we had recorded a trans-causal element, that elusive particle of the faster-than-light tachyon, and these tachyons are in effect what had caused our instrument blips. So many theories!

"From here we divided our research into two teams. An engineering team began a physical extrapolation and compilation of the readings on the EEG, EKG, and other electrical connections, and a psychological team began a symptom-based study of the Muse Sensation consciousness effects. Again without getting into some of the more technical matter which will be published in our full report, let it suffice to say at this point that our psychological team deduced that our intensified focus on synchronistic phenomenon, which led from our Nape Effect through Homogenization, to the Muse Effect, was in effect producing yet another fourth phenomenon: Tulpa Generation, of which the Muse herself was a first indication of the generation, transmission, or reception thereof.

“Tulpas, as most of you will know, are the psychic phenomenon which occurs among many Tibetan adepts when they concentrate on the creation of a totally imaginary thought formation. In a lesser form, it also has occurred among Westerners, for example the legendary "Phillip" experiments among a group of Canadian psychics in which a totally imaginary character began to manifest itself with "table rappings" at a mediumistic séance. We could then conclusively determine that our synchronistic concentrations were again somehow affecting physical matter in an as of yet undetermined manner. Could these tulpas have been tachyonic-generated impressions?

"Our psychological team then speculated that the synchronicities might perhaps be the manifestation of time and consciousness folding back upon itself, or in front of itself, as the case may be, and that the continued focus on synchronicities which could create tulpas were basically serving as holographic projections of the mind folding unto a future materialization of form -- or perhaps a past one -- a result of the concentration of energy of the synchronistic thought impulse. The generated tulpas in this respect might be conceivably serving as pre-emitted Faster-Than-Light signals of what could come to pass in our time-space coordinates at some later, by our evaluatory standards, pre-determined instance. Or, on the other hand, the tulpas could perhaps be a "reincarnation" of an event or personage in the past, in which case might serve as a possible explanation of the ghost phenomenon. In any event, the events seems to distort time and space—perhaps a scenario for a future endeavor into time travel.

"This conclusion of the FTL signals proved to be an unexpected discovery, but totally consistent with our initial premise of concentrating synchronicities with potential time travel. If synchronicities were Faster-Than-Light signals, their acausal nature could be explained. There was no conclusive evidence, of course, to substantiate this claim, but all of the math from our engineering team seemed to point to it, as with the reoccurrence of complex numbers in the calculations, for instance. Again, details of this will occur in our published report. But It would appear that the synchronistically generated tulpas were ‘tachyonic generated impressions’ or ‘emissions.’

“This determination would seem to confirm the findings of our engineering team that nothing wrong with our brain-recording equipment, but rather that our participants had actually perceived the Muse before the blip occurred, leading us to conclude that the acausal nature of the phenomenon was a fairly accurate assessment.

"We proceeded to take our experiments one step further, and, granted, there was a growing strange spookiness as we attempted to conduct our projects. Indeed, there seemed to have coalesced the collective consciousness about us. In our previous synchronistic studies, the synchronicities appeared to be individually meaningful to each particular respondent, but now our synchronicities became collectively meaningful, a fifth resultant phenomenon from our increased concentrations. It was almost as if we had all entered the exact realm of what Rupert

Sheldrake hypothesized to be a ‘morphological resonance,’ the universal consciousness that underlies every basic aspect of human existence. There is no doubt in my mind, nor indeed in the minds of any of the participants in this research project, that we had entered a much higher level of consciousness. Indeed we seemed to be in a strange primeval state: I myself personally felt as if I was standing on the edge of an abyss, ready not so much as to fall into it as to have it reach up and swallow me.

“I should mention here that at this time a number of our researchers and volunteers dropped from our further investigations. Many cited reasons that we were dealing with the demonic and had no business conducting it. For them the very fabric of reality, the innate nature of matter, and the stability of space-time was literally unraveling and had been breached to a level of seriously affecting their mental stability. It also affected those of us who chose to continue our experimentation. We had entered Castle Perilous, and while the drawbridge was still open behind us, there was the distinct, unexplained fear that it might shut upon us at any time and that we would be lost forever. In the words of my chief engineer, who also dropped out at this time, we were "scared shitless." Our very sanity was threatened; we had definitely entered a new world. We could only conclude that we had reached into a totally different neural network than that in which we were accustomed. We had experienced a frequency phase-shift from our world and touched another dimension, but in reality, we all thought we might be going batshit crazy.

"We sat in a regular meeting among all of our remaining participants at which time those who wanted out could leave with no admonishment nor loss of face. Those of us who stayed were the ones perceived as fools, especially by ourselves. But at this meeting, perhaps in the spirit of scientific exploration, we decided that we would take the experimentation at least one step further, and then perhaps we would let the matter rest. We were going to continue our collective synchronistic concentrations on the specified nature of the Muse, which by all agreement and accounts, opinions, and emotional feelings involved, was not a demonic influence, but rather one of a cosmic Love. We would continue to concentrate on it, focus on the tachyonic speculations, scrutinize the faster than light potentialities of what we were doing and of what we had speculated and theorized, and would focus on the tulpa generations by virtue of our own thoughts, focus on the synchronicities themselves, focus on the continued Tarot and I Ching readings. We were uncertain of what our results might be with this experiment, but our scientific quest, and I must add, a strong added amount of individual faith, prompted us to carry on our experimentation.

"Our primary focus in the beginning of this expanded study was to place ourselves in a state of mind which we felt would be most conducive to our continuing study -- we would close our eyes, perhaps say a small prayer or vocalize a specific Yogic mantra in order to place our psyches in the alpha state of mental brain wave activity, and as you all know this state is a brain level in which the mind operates in an intuitive, almost spiritual node. We above all concentrated on pure thoughts, in communion with our respective spiritual Godheads, on pure white light surrounding our very essence as protection. All of our instruments again continued to monitor the results of brain wave and physical body activity -- this was set up not only to record mental observations and data, but also to insure physical safety in the event that any of our remaining participants would happen to ‘freak out,’ if I may use the phrase from the Sixties drug culture.

"We began this next phase of experimentation much as we had when we first began our concentration on synchronicities, and we again began to experience the electromagnetic Nape Effect, the Homogenization of the right and left portions of the brain, and the elusive Muse Effect---all the more rapidly, I should add. Our Muse would appear, much more quickly, still fleetingly, apparently since we had been able to enter the altered alpha state more rapidly, but still without a real description. Some of us perceived the Muse as a blonde, others as a brunette; some as a dark-skinned woman; some as a red-headed man; some as slim and sexually passionate, others as plump and Buddha-like; sometimes the Muse was seemingly clad in red, sometimes in black, sometimes semi-nude, sometimes fully clothed in colorful

garb; always defined from perceptions in our peripheral range of vision. Even while none of us could really describe the Muse, all of us concurred that the Muse was extremely beautiful is a cosmic sort of way.

"And again and almost immediately thereafter our fearful tulpas began to materialize: black cat-like objects jumping from a table where they had not been before and disappearing before they reached the floor, black shadowy humanoid-looking figures which would dart from hall to doorway, shadow birds flying off into the air from nowhere without a sound, stranger yet black apparitions which would loom like ghosts or demons from the corner of our eyes only to vanish in thin air if we turned to look at them. A smell of ozone, or burnt matches, or dead animal roadkill would fill the air, a cold chill would descend on the room. Our entire experiment was taking on such a frightening quality that again we decided to pull back from our progress in order not to be rendered completely insane. We were indeed close to the 'goblin universe.'

"Many more of our staff abandoned the project at this time. The distortions of reality, or perhaps better the manifestations of a new reality, proved to be unmanageable for them. To them we wish nothing but the best, and hope that they will recover fully.

"A literal handful of us remained, determined in our hearts and minds to overcome what we perceived to be an irrational fear of the Unknown, and decided to pursue the matter to its undetermined conclusion: Myself; my electrical engineering associate Bobby St. Clair; Anastasia Marx, a graduate student in psychology at Southern Methodist University; Jessica DeLire, one of our volunteers who was interested in seeing the matter fulfil its course; and Boogie Phillips, a close personal musical acquaintance of mine whom I have known for many years. We had at this point been joined by Harvey W. Kingsport, Associate Instructor of Physics at the University of Texas in Austin. Harv was integral in establishing the most stringent scientific control guidelines, equipment certifications and calibrations, and indeed, paradigms, necessary for the most serious scientific evaluation of this project, and he was, I must add, the most fearless of the lot.

"However, at this point, it was collectively agreed that we all needed a vacation, so to speak. It was as simple as that. We needed a break to evaluate our work. We agreed on one weekend. I was not proud of our inhumane working conditions, but we all understood that the grant money from the San Saba Archive and Research Institute would expire soon and there was so much more to do. Most of us took the time off and out; I myself spent the entire time on beginning the serious written analysis of this project.

"Interestingly enough, when we all reconvened the following Monday afternoon, all six of us had also spent a good portion of our 'vacation' compiling our own individual notes on the subject matter---therein rested yet another incredible synchronicity. Everyone's own personal evaluations and journal logs are included in our final published report.

"Before we would decide to abandon our experiment completely, however, we decided to implement our project with one serious determination of Harv's work. We decided to generate and transmit the electromagnetic impulses received from the Nape Effect and from the impulses created by our collective alpha waves into an electromagnetic field which would emit from our equipment pulsed at 7.83 hertz, our determined average field of our alpha states as well as the resonant frequency of the Earth itself, indeed a harmonic of the Schumann Resonance; in essence, we were going to transmit into, and receive from, the electromagnetic field of our scientific project of synchronistic concentration. This field, which we would contain within our studios by a previously installed copper sheeting around the perimeters of the room as a form of Faraday Cage, we concluded, might actually be able to focus and localize our tulpa generations into a more stabilized form. We would additionally increase the harnessing of our synchronistic concentration on a common thought, namely that of basically asking the tulpas, which we were sure would appear, to stay and

communicate with us; this thought concentration was one which we collectively agreed could be used to determine whether there actually was a bridge between mind and matter in our experimentations. We elected to concentrate on having those shadowy black mental tulpas forge into a determined shape and then would attempt the communication process.

"We began our final experiment, the six of us huddled together in the main room of our research studio. As we all held hands together in mediumistic fashion, concentrating with closed eyes on our aforementioned goals, the Muse appeared first, appearing as if she had been "beamed down" from the Starship Enterprise, and began to swirl around the center room in a beautiful pattern of colorful lights. She or he became focused in the center of our entwined circle, a radiant hair-form the color of a moonlight mist swirling around seemingly smoky, misty bare shoulders, clad in what appeared to be a flowing bright yellow raiment which flowed below knees and appeared to be only to have its form dissolve into the air of the room, giving her no substance there except for the likeness of a swirl of cigarette smoke. Its form was formless.

"Needless to say, we were all stunned by this magnificent apparition. We all watched transfixed as it appeared to brush luscious golden hair with shapeless cloudy hands. I finally felt compelled to break this wonderful silence to continue our scientific explorations in a form of communication.

"'Who are you?" I asked. 'Can you talk with us?'

"It looked up at the ceiling of the laboratory as if startled. Please bear in mind that there was no other light in the room save for her luminescence, the LEDs and LCDs of the equipment, and a single 15 watt night light attached in the adjoining hallway.

"I am the Muse". The voice was in our heads, in a tenor tone that Boogie later declared to be in Middle C. It was also in English, but with an accent that was totally unfamiliar to us.

"'Are you real?' I asked.

"'I am as real as the minds that called me." Its smoky form continued to flow with the breeze of the room, shimmering like a mother of pearl oyster as it faded into the thread worn carpet.

"We could only surmise that our experiment in creating, concentrating, and containing the electromagnetic field of our own thoughts had been successful. We had, in effect, created a quasi-physical manifestation of the Muse. I also have to state that the answers of our creation seemed to reflect what we wanted it to say, that perhaps this was not an independent entity but rather a manifestation of our own minds, much like the 'Philip' experiments.

"Suddenly, the swirling golden vision faded away rapidly without a further comment. The room went dark. Indeed, at this point all our electrical power failed: Our equipment, our lighting, our cameras. I could only hope that our computers had not totally failed and that we had been able to save a little of this historical scientific documentation. Even the feeble night light in the hallway failed after a brief struggle against voltage drop, and we were plunged into almost total darkness save for the shine of the partly-cloudy light of a quarter-moon outside our studio.

"I recall at this point that Anastasia had broken from our circle and made an attempt to turn on the main lights in the room. Strangely, but not unexpectedly, the lights did not energize when she flicked the switch on and off; in fact, the power to our entire modest complex seemed to have been drained; we were left in total darkness. All of our equipment lay paralyzed; we had all broken the mediumistic ranks of our hands and were busy murmuring to each other about the current situation. At some point I had managed to grab Anastasia's arm as she had attempted to find her way back from the light switch to us, and held her hand both to reassure her trembling figure as well as at this point to perhaps calm my own trepidations.

"As we accustomed our eyes to the crescent moon and starlight illumination from the outside, even I was not ready for the

specters which were to greet our limited vision. The tulpas had arrived.

"At this point I think it is fair to say that the six of us were on the point of sheer terror, even fearless Harvey. Boogie confessed to me later that he had completely drenched his pants. None of us had ever experienced anything like this, and believe you me, I do not believe that I would ever like to experience it again. As we lay cowered together in a muddled heap in the center of the studio, I could see swirls darker than the room begin to coalesce in front of us. The dark figures were blacker than black, dark brown, dark gray, with traces of dark blue and dark green. After what seemed like hours of these dancing dark shapes swirling around the room, accompanied by what I can only described as popcorn-fart-like static electromagnetic crackles, I finally re-opened my eyes to glance at the apparitions before us. In the grayish-blue lighting of the night, I could see six humanoid figures, all of them a shade of dark black which only suggested the shadow of a shadow, yet they were all well-defined against the backdrop of the night light. None of them possessed the hazy, holographic outlines of our elusive muse; they were clearly defined shadows, as if cast from a mold of solid, non-reflective basalt, or perhaps better, as if they were dark holes in the fabric of space-time. And, I should add, there was an unexplainable quality of familiarity about them.

"As the six of us slowly disgorged from our Gordian knot of fear to observe the black apparitions, we collectively, and telepathically—yes, telepathically-- agreed that the figures were not going to entertain any sort of harm to our bodies or soul. Indeed, I would almost swear that there was almost a common degree of dread among the Black Figures. The six of us all stood in a line now, shoulder to shoulder with each other so as to retain a human touch amongst ourselves; interestingly, the Black Shadows also aligned themselves in front of us in a similar manner. It was almost as if our both groups were mirror images of each other; not so much mirror images in the standard bathroom-medicine-cabinet sense as much as mirror images of an alternate side of each of our individual consciousness.

"I do not know how long we stared at those strange apparitions, or how long they stared at us. Finally, I recall Harv asking with incredulity, 'Who are you?'

"The Shadow directly across from Harv responded after several seconds, after what we determined to be a glancing over at his shadowy compatriots. ‘We are here because we were called here.' Its voice was a deep baritone, gnarly intonations of a guttural nature, but not really a voice, but again rather a sound in our heads. Then it continued, almost threateningly, 'Why did you call us here?'

"Harv was still talking. The rest of us were transfixed by the specters in front of us. 'Uh, we are experimenting with time and space. Where are you from?'

"From what I could gather, the gnarly shadow conferred with its compatriots before it responded. Then it spoke again, in a deeper voice and slower intonation, 'We have been called here against our wills,' the deep, black voice said. 'If you have called us here, you are treading upon serious matters of which you have no understanding.'

"‘Why is that?' Jessica asked innocently. 'We mean you no harm. We come in peace in the spirit of scientific exploration.'

"The shadow directly across from Jessica replied this time, in a still guttural-like tenor voice, perhaps a little softer than that of the baritone shadow which had spoken in our heads before. Its accent was also strange, a different strange than that of the baritone. 'We understand that you mean us no evil. But the voyage itself has become the danger. You have disrupted the fabric of the dimensional matrices. The possibilities of total chaos are too close to allow. You must allow us to leave; you must leave yourselves. There is immediate danger.'

“I could not swear that the figures were actually talking, but these were the impressions that we telepathically heard in our minds. And these tulpas were not reflecting our own minds, as the Muse had done---they were totally independent of our consciousness.

"While the shadow was talking, it occurred to me that while we had been able, after our mind-wrenching experiments, to conjure these black forms here, I myself had no earthly idea on what to do to 'allow them to leave'. A sudden thread of dread shot through my heart as I realized that we may have conjured forth something which we could not control, in which we could not put down or send back.

"In this meantime, I noticed in the dim lighting of outside moonlight that my engineer Bobby St. Clair was advancing cautiously, oh, so very cautiously, towards the line of black figures with an arm and pointed figured extended. His corresponding shadow on the line also was approaching towards Bobby, with a mirroring matching black arm extended. All of us on both sides of the dimensional stood like statues to watch. The closer the two figures approached, the more the light from static charges filled the air like fireflies on a hot summer night. There was the distinct smell of ozone, or maybe the smell of dust being burnt away from a space heater. As they advanced closer and closer, the fireflies became lines of electricity flying through the night air between their extended fingers; the electrical arcs became greater and longer with each oncoming step. The lines then became small fireballs, and it occurred to me then and there that there was soon to be a major electric reaction in which the positive and negative electric poles of two opposing forces would very soon arc together.

“Another grip of fear seized me and I shouted, 'Bobby, don't!!' I heard my scream in stereo from the other side of the room; I can only assume that my shadowy counterpart also voiced its concern at the same time.

"But it was too late. I do remember the large arc-flash of light, brighter than any sun, like the flash from a welder’s arc, and I vaguely remember the explosion which threw me backwards; with that I lost consciousness.

"When I came to, the laboratory was in flames. Not uncontrollable flames, mind you, but there was a serious conflagration. I was bleeding from my head where I had apparently struck the console behind me, the salty taste of blood dripping into my mouth. Jessica was battling the flames with a fire extinguisher. She appeared to be uninjured. Anastasia was still unconscious; I could see Boogie and Harv slowly getting to their feet, both trying to clear their respective heads. There was no sign of Bobby. And there was no sign of our dark visitors. We managed to stop the fire, but the studio was a lost cause. Harvey and I carried the limp Anastasia outside; she was breathing and had no serious wounds we could ascertain. But we were all covered in a black soot-like dust.

"After all of us were outside the building, I did managed to run back inside the building, and with Jessica's and Boogie's help we were able to salvage most of the notes and paperwork of our experimentation.

“Thankfully the Volunteer Fire Department and emergency rescue units arrived quickly, but the building was a loss. Anastasia was rushed to the hospital, with Boogie and Harv by her side, (and she has fully recovered, escaping with a mild concussion and a sprained wrist). I had controlled the cuts on my scalp and declined medical attention at that time.

"Jessica took the initiative and spoke with the police and fire officials as I stood amidst the rubble, trying to refocus. After the rescue squads had left and Jessica and I stood alone in silence, we observed from the mid-ground back drop of the woods behind the lab the emergence of a shadow, walking towards us.

"Again a grip of fear seized me as I thought the Dark Shadowed Tulpas had returned. But Jessica whispered softly at my side, 'It's Bobby.' And it was Bobby! He too was blackened with soot, his eyebrows and most of his hair had been almost completely singed, and he was limping slightly. And a wide grin was spread across his face. His teeth, with a prominent exception, were lighting up his face like a Cheshire cat. He must have seen the incredulity in my face, for he wrapped his arms around me and squeezed me in a bear hug.

"'Cleve, I've seen the Other Side,' he remarked simply. With that he held up his left hand to show me his index finger that had connected with his Shadow. There was nothing beyond the last knuckle; skin, bone, fingernail were all gone. The break was clean and cauterized, as if it was its natural state. He was amused by my concern. 'Don't worry about it. It'll grow back....In a split second, Cleve, I understood how to send them back. I'll have to tell you about it someday....'"

"After he hugged Jessica, he limped the yards to his battered Chevrolet. He unlocked the door, and seeing us staring after him, he offered, with his same wide-mouthed grin, 'Hey Cleve and Jess, let's do it again sometime.'

"And therein it ended, once and for all, my own experimentations into this unknown realm. The published report of our total research findings will be available soon, with great thanks to Anastasia Marx for compiling the entire matter into its final form and the San Saba Archive and Research Institute for its continued financial assistance. I understand that Anastasia has obtained her doctorate degree in psychology based on this experimentation. Gladly, none of the six of us involved in the final phase of this experiment suffered any long term effects from the incident, either physically or mentally. Even the loss of the outer part of Bobby St. Clair's index finger does not seem to have troubled him; he almost seems content about the whole matter. He is convinced that it will grow back. Indeed, the doctors at Sam Hopkins Memorial Hospital cannot believe the degree of blastema buildup in the healing of his wound. Harvey is still continuing his research into the field, but he is sticking to the mathematics part of it. I still have not understood how Jessica DeLire emerged completely unscathed from the explosion, but this is one of those matters in the hands of Providence beyond the realm of human understanding. And, amazingly, the music of Boogie Philips seems to have undertaken a new wondrous flair which I cannot explain---I can only surmise that the intensity of our synchronicity research resulted in a greater actualization of the synchronization factor of musical jamming.

"Again, the final published results of our investigations will be available shortly, but I will offer one quick and final analysis. I think that, with our research and experiments into synchronistic phenomena, we were able to mentally quantify an actual materialization of anti-matter, one which produced a power source so intense that it was able to mechanically alter the fabric of space-time. But most importantly, I believe that we have temporarily achieved open destination teleportation and bi-location. If there were any scientific doubts about quantum entanglement, we have put them to rest. Perhaps one day, when we are all smarter and more human, probably in a manner in which I dare not venture guesses, we will be able to access those other dimensions of space and time. When our anti-matter counterparts encountered the matter of our own physical world, the two dissolved each other. And, in retrospect, it is probably good that our laboratory accident happened when it did; there is no telling what may have happened if for some reason our extra-dimensional friends had been allowed to roam unchecked into our own physical world.

"So, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Neighbors, I leave you with your own speculations on this matter. Perhaps you will dismiss it all as imaginative science fiction; perhaps you yourselves will delve into this realm of exploration, but please heed my lesson. Please understand that there is so much more that we need to learn. Myself, I believe I will follow less intriguing pursuits for a while, like maybe writing short stories.

"I will be more than happy to entertain any questions from the audience at this point. I again thank all of you for your patience in waiting until now for your enquiries. Thank you, and May The Force be with you all!

"No questions? M'am, I promised that I would get back to your enquiry...You forgot it? I am truly sorry. I didn't mean to disavow you like I did; a thought is a terrible thing to waste. No further questions? Then I bid all of you good night. As all this talk has dried my throat, I will be adjourning to Tolstoy's Pub down the

street for a cold beer, and I invite you all to join me informally. Thank you all once again for your patience and consideration."

[Overheard on recording equipment following the adjournment]

"Man, that guy is a total kook, but I have to give him credit for story-telling...."

"You know, honey, that was pretty wild stuff. Do you really think that...."

"I thought you said that we parked the car over here...."

"Herbie, look at this. I would almost swear that that there was an oak tree here when we came in, not a sycamore."

"Don't let this guy's stuff go to your head, Margaret, we both know that an oak tree was there when we came in."

"Operator, that number can't be disconnected. I LIVE there."

"Holy shit. Is that a pterodactyl?"

RANDOM NOTES ON THE PEACE GENERATOR

(Editor's note: The following letter was sent to us bearing a Caspar, Wyoming postmark and no return address. Its complete text is printed here.)

Dear Mom and Dad:

I'm really sorry that I have out of touch for so long. I have been meaning to write but there never seems to be enough time. My God, how long has it been? How are you both? I hope that this letter finds you both in the best of health and that everything is going well. I am doing fine.

How is Tommy? Tell him that I found that carburetor he was looking for and that I will send it to him as soon as I can. Dad, if you still have Cicero, some dude in Boulder, Colorado said that he would pay top dollar for him. Apparently he thinks that Cicero is prime polled Hereford! I gave him your number and told him to get in touch with you.

I know that you all have been worried about me, probably wondering if I was even still alive. I'm really sorry for not writing sooner, and just disappearing like I did....I'm really sorry, Mom, I know how you worry about things like that. I owe you all a good letter and an explanation to let you both know that I am alright and safe.

Have you been in touch with Melody? I need to write to her soon also. Please tell her that you heard from me and that I miss her very much. I know that she is waiting for an explanation too. I mean, when somebody disappears for a year you kinda wonder what is going on. Tell her that I will write her soon.

Also, be sure to tell Andy at Myrtle's Exxon to pay you the money he owes me. It should be about $700. I gave him a very good price so don't let him try to crawfish out of anything.

I am safe and sound, to let you both know that. I am on the road right now, traveling with a country-western band around the

country and just trying to lay low for a while. No, Mom, the Law ain't looking for me again. But I think that the Air Force might be.

It's a long story. I guess I need to start at the beginning. Remember, back last January, I was driving for Oklahoma Packing Co. out of Pryor? I was on the road most of the time, but when I was back in Pryor I would usually drive 75 or so miles to Barnsdall to see Melody. Well, last January 14 I had my route. Oklahoma City first, then on to Lawton, where I had about three stops and then two in Wichita Falls before I got on US 281 and headed all the way to San Antonio. Well, you know me, those hills out there are so beautiful that I just had to take a couple of side roads and just drive around for a while. Besides, I was getting tired of getting stuck behind all those Yankee snow birds in their Winnebagos and really didn't give a hoot about my route. It was dry and windy that day and the dust was blowing in the air. You could see those dust devils whirling and swirling around those hills like they were dancing.

I get mortified just thinking about this, but I need to tell somebody about the strange things that have been happening. I need to get it off my chest. Dad, you remember all those stories Grandpa used to tell about the Green Corn Rebellion way back when? Well, the whole thing is sorta like that only more serious than a heart attack.

I ended up in some small town called San Saba. It was getting late enough for me to call it a day. I checked into Nall's Motel, showered, and set off to get me a bite to eat. I was still coughing up cotton from all that dust on the road so I had a couple of cold ones while I was waiting for my chicken fried steak and greens, at some place called the Capshaw Cattle Company. They were setting up for a band, some group called San Saba Sinewave, which I gathered were some local kids who had made good with their music. I've always enjoyed music and decided that I would stick around. The place slowly started to fill up and in a couple of hours it was packed tighter than a snare drum.

It's really hard to describe the sounds that the band made. Try to imagine three saxophones playing in perfect harmony, and a bass that produced a hypnotic beat, and a lead guitar that I swear actually produced electricity in the room. They had a jazzy sound, but you could hear the country roots coming through. I have never heard a band that could play so much in tune with itself—one instrument would seem to know what another instrument was fixing to play before the music was even played. But the major effect of the music was that everybody---I mean everybody--- in that beer joint -- from the waitresses and the busboys to the little old ladies with walkers -- everybody was dancing. Even me. I don't even remember who I danced with but I danced like my feet never touched the floor. It was almost magical. I had the greatest time of my life.

I don't know how long the band played, not really paying much attention to it, but I too remember a sheriff's deputy coming in and saying that they had had a complaint about it being too loud. It wasn't even ten o'clock. Well, the whole crowd got to booing and hissing at him, so finally he said it would be alright for the band to do one more number.

So the band gets ready for its going out number. About that time this little skinny old guy wearing a sports coat and one of those Humphrey Bogart hats gets on stage, grinning like a possum. There's some clapping like people know who he is. The old guy bows to the audience and introduced himself as Cleveland Maxwell, and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we'd like to do a song called Jazz Benediction, and we dedicate this song to a world of peace and love for everybody." People start clapping and a couple of drunks start crowing like bandy roosters, and this old man Cleve takes a couple of tarnished spoons wrapped with bands of colored electrical tape out of his vest pocket; he starts tapping them slowly up in front of the microphone, then a little quicker, then quicker still and the whole band falls in and they begin to generate music even more electrifying than their previous tunes, and soon the whole place is jumping and shaking once more. Old Cleve is moonwalking, boogie-ing and bebopping all around the stage like a voodoo medicine man, and

then the three saxophonists all hit a super C note at the same time and all the lights in the bar dimmed like there was an energy draw on them and there was a loud noise like a thunderclap outside....

I really figured that I had had enough to drink by that time. That last song almost scared me; it was so energetic....It was almost spooky.

For some reason I hung around the bar for a while, chatting with some of the folks there, even while the hall was clearing out. I guess that I stayed around because I had had such a good time, but sometimes now I wish I had left then and there. There were a few other folks milling around, including Old Cleve and a couple of the guys in the band. I did notice, though, that the deputy's car wouldn't start, but I didn't pay any attention to it at the time. Cleve and Bobby and Boogie, some of the guys in the band, and Bobby's wife or girlfriend all sat near the corner talking quietly among themselves, although Bobby's wife was so drunk she just giggled a lot. Cleve looked at his watch and turned on the bar TV and turned it to the 10 o'clock news. The announcer was giving the news, including one item about how there had been some demonstrations against a recent nuclear test in Nevada. I just kinda blurted out, "They ain't gonna be happy till they've blown us to pieces."

Cleve and Bobby looked at me sorta curious and serious, and Cleve swallowed the last of his beer, pushed his hat back a little, sat back in his stool and said quietly, "Not if we can help it."

Mom and Dad, you know me. I've been against them nuclear weapons since I was in high school. They ain't nothing but the handiwork of madmen and they threaten all existence of life on this planet. I ain't no communist or anything, and I did my time in 'Nam like they sent me to do, but I know that the only good nuke is no nuke.

Anyway, Cleve, Boogie, Bobby, and Cindy, Bobby's wife, all turn their heads back to the news. The announcer was saying something like "details were sketchy but that there has been a 'minor explosion' at the Pantex nuclear weapons assembly plant in Amarillo."

Everybody got real quiet. Cleve said something under his breath like "Praise the Lord."

I got the impression right then that they thought they had caused that explosion at the Pantex plant with their music, like it had all been planned and everything, and I especially remembered how the lights had dimmed and fizzed and how there had been that large thunderclap, *right about the same time as the Pantex explosion.* The whole thing was getting really spooky about that time: I had no idea what sort of witchcraft was going on or even if I just wasn't going crazy.

Bobby began explaining to me how they discovered a formula for neutralizing the hate vibes that were found in military armaments by finding a resonant frequency that would render them totally ineffectual; that all they had to do was to find the proper sequence of chords and pitch and harmony and rhythm, say a prayer, and it would happen. Boogie said it was the super C on the saxes that maxxed it. Bobby explained further about other things that had to do with Ohm's Law and quantum mechanics and other stuff which I had no earthly inkling of what he was talking about, but I began to think that maybe I wasn't the one who was a couple of bubbles off plumb. I know that whole barroom started to spin at that point so I just went back to my motel room to sleep it off.

I got out of bed late the next morning, making sure I had slept off all of the beer and the weird dreamlike experiences of the night before. I planned to leave later that afternoon; knowing I could make San Antonio in three hours easy and I could always make up some easy excuse for any downtime. I checked out of the motel and walked across the highway to the Cactus Cafe, where my rig was parked, and sat down to have some lunch. The Abilene paper had an article about how there had been a minor "disruption" at the Pantex plant in Amarillo which had diffused

34 nuclear warheads. No one had been hurt, details were sketchy, and the cause of the accident was unknown.

I started to get real excited again. The whole thing *had* happened: it had been no crazy dream. I got to shaking so bad I couldn't even hold a cup of coffee in my hand.

Then the Air Force squad cars began rolling into town, more than a dozen of them. They spread out all over San Saba, just like they were going into battle. I just knew that I would shit in my britches right there in that restaurant booth. They went into every business in town and began asking questions. When they came into the restaurant I just sat as still as I could and tried to sink out of sight. That sergeant was asking if anyone had noticed anyone bringing any heavy equipment into town the night before. The waitress just said that the band had set up to play, but that was about it. He went on to say that they had picked up some unknown radio blips on their radar right about the same time the thing at the Pantex plant happened, and that they were investigating it to see if it had any connection.

I waited till the Air Force had left and then I was out of that cafe faster than a New York minute. I had to get out of San Saba immediately.

I walked as fast as I could to my rig, and as I rounded the front of the hood who should be standing by the driver's door but Cleve and Bobby. My heart must have stopped for several minutes. I was sure that they were going to put some sort of voodoo hex on me.

They sensed my nervousness. "Hey, man, it's alright," said Cleve softly. "We ain't gonna mess with you."

"We're going underground," Bobby continued tersely.

We sat down right there in the San Saba sand and talked for a couple of hours. They explained to me that they were going to disappear for a while till the heat died down. Cleve said that I could do what I wanted but he made a special plea that I not betray their friendship and turn them in. I agreed to that. I think I agreed to it at the time more out of fear for my own hide, but in 20-20 hindsight I think that I made the right decision.

We all traded addresses in order to stay in touch. I gave them Melody's phone number in Barnsdall. Bobby gave us the phone number of a friend in San Antonio and Cleve gave me an address: PO Box 2640, Austin TX 78768.

I guess that I calmed down finally and realized that they were both sincere and would do nothing to harm me. We all shook hands as I was getting ready to depart. Cleve squeezed a cassette tape in my palm. "We made a tape of the jam last night. Thought you might want to have a copy."

I fired up my rig and pulled off the gravel onto the blacktop as soon as the diesel warmed up. In my rearview mirror I could see them both waving after me as I headed out of town. I finished my run and returned to Pryor without incident. The whole San Saba incident faded further and further in my brain till I was sure that the whole thing was just a weird dream....

A couple of months later Melody and I had gone out with Tommy Dodge and his wife Betty. We were sitting around in my old '66 LTD (the one I bought from Old Lady McNeil for $200) halfway thinking about driving to Tulsa, since you know how much night life there is in Pryor, even on a Saturday night. Even O'Kelley's Irish Pub was deader than a graveyard. Tommy and Betty had met us there in the Wal-Mart parking lot so we could car-pool. While we were deciding what to do I found that cassette that Old Cleve had given me, and I popped it in the tape deck.

Soon we were all dancing around and enjoying ourselves, and more people started to drop by, like Cassy Peters and her sister Jill and Jill's husband. People were even coming out of the Wal-Mart to join us. Before you knew it there must have been 40 or 50 people dancing right there in the parking lot. I even turned the volume up. After a while the law drove up and said that we didn't have a permit and that we would have to break it up. That fat cop was a sorry hard-assed old weasel and he let you know right quick he didn't like your kind in his town. And the more

people argued with him or kept on dancing the more pissed he got. I saw him unsnap his holster right about the time the magical music was coming to an end. The saxophones hit that C Super C pitch and suddenly there was that loud thunderclap again (with not a cloud in the sky) and all the lights in town seemed to dim like there was some sort of energy drain on them.

Meanwhile, that old lawdog's car wouldn't start and his battery had gone totally dead. He got wound up like an eight-day clock.

And I was getting scared again. I told Melody that I wasn't feeling good and that I just wanted to be alone and I know she didn't understand, but I couldn't tell her anything. I really need to write her right away. I couldn't sleep a wink that night -- I just tossed and turned in a pool of cold sweat. And when I listened to the news on KMYZ they just told me what I already suspected: that there had been a minor explosion at Vance Air Force Base, that no one had been injured, that details had been sketchy, etc. And early Sunday morning I was not surprised to look out my window and see Air Force vehicles and National Guard troops swarming in droves to all parts of the city. This time they came armed in full battle gear.

I knew that Bobby and Cleve had managed to put the work of their Peace Generator on that cassette, and indeed they had found the way to fight war with music. I also knew I could not stay in Pryor any longer. I also knew that by this time the Air Force would have linked it to the Wal-Mart location, especially after they talked to that fat cop.

I didn't answer my phone for the rest of the day. I just knew it was Melody calling, but I couldn't talk to her. Please let her read this letter and maybe she will understand a little, and I will write her as soon as I can. Too many things were left unsaid between me and her.

Monday morning I left town with my usual run to Texas without saying goodbye to anyone. And, as scared as I was, I did have to chuckle when the National Guard roadblock searched through the sides of beef on my rig looking for clues. And, after I finished my run, I ditched my rig in Austin and disappeared.

Whew. I sure needed to get all of that off my chest. I feel a big sigh of relief. And, you know, the more I think about things the more questions I have, like why maybe some of those small Okie towns had outlawed dancing back in the day -- it's like they were trying to prevent people from feeling good. And I'll bet that they knew something about all of this that they did not want people to know about.

It's like the Green Corn Rebellion all over again, Dad. Every day I'm meeting more and more people who share my ideas, and I know that all of us are fighting for peace. And, yes, I still have the tape.

Yes, Momma, I am eating right. I get meals with this job I have now and they feed us well. You both will be happy to know that I haven't had a cigarette in six months.

I gotta go. I will write again soon. Please get in touch with Melody for me. So, 'til next time, I am on the road and on the run. I love you both; take good care.

Love,

Your Son

DER FLEDERMAUS

May 26, 1897, San Saba, Texas.

"Yes, young man. I do understand your question. And you don't have to shout. I'm not deaf you know. Maybe perhaps a tad bit absent minded, but certainly not deaf. Why, I can still tune a fiddle by ear and I have also been tuning these guitar things too, so there is no need to shout. ...So what was your name, boy, and why are you here?"

"My name is Bill Loe, Mr. Maxwell, like I told you. I'm a reporter for the *Southern Mercury*, and I would like to talk with you."

"Nugent's bunch? Hmm. Well, I'm not ready to join yet. They've got some good stuff, but none of them want to seriously address the fact of...."

"I'm *not* here to get you to join, Mr. Maxwell. I just want to interview you for the *Southern Mercury* about your role in the Battle of the Nueces. I'm a history student at Texas University and I need to complete my master's thesis in..."

"Oh, an egghead, huh, kid? Hhhrumphhh. Here, have a seat. What was your name again? The Battle of the Nueces. Hah! If you want to call it that....

I was in the fields trimming back the rope crop and when my wife calls me from the haus.

"Kleveland, there is Max Wohl and another man to see you."

I dropped my saw and began to the haus. I did not run, merely with a good gait, like the mule when she does not want to work any harder.

Old man Wohl is my patron saint. He has helped me more than I can ever recall. He is like a grandfather to me. As I got to the haus, I sees him, his white beard blowing past him as he stands and waves to me with his back to the south wind. I do not know the other man.

I reach hims and pulls him close to me. He returns my embrace. He is such a kind, good old man. All he cares about, it seems, is the good of the *kameradin*.

We separate, and he holds me by the shoulders. "When was the last time I have seen you, *Enkelkind*? You are putting some meat on your bones. Mina is taking very good care of you."

I turned and looked at my *Liebschen*. She was beaming largely, pulling back some of her autumn hair from her eyes. She also loved old man Wohl. Little Gustav ran over to him also and wrapped his arms around his leg.

Old man Wohl stooped to picked up the boy and stiffened. "*Jugend*, your mamma is feeding you good also. I can no longer lift you up." He chuckled.

Gustav continued holding the old man's leg, as Max tussled his hair. Mina finally pulled him away. There was men-talk in the air.

My Kleveland, this Jacob Kuechler. He is a friend and *kamerad*."

I shook hands with the middle-aged gentleman. He had warm blue eyes, with a face of pox marks, and a black beard that grew well in some places and not so well in them other places. His mouth was missing a tooth in front.

"*Jawohl, Kamerad Kuechler*. I have heard of you. You were with der *Vierziger"*

Jakob threw back his bearded face and laughed with a good laugh. "*Ja*, that is right. What a life we had. It was very good, until some did not want to work like the others. Then it was time to go forward.... I began to worry about the Comanches. They began to steal things." His eyes drifted away for a moment. "But it was very good. For a while the *Utopie* seemed to exist."

"*Ja*, sometimes they come here also when they want to bargain." I replied, making talk. There was men-talk in the air.

Old Man Wohl spoke again. "We left Sisterdale yesterday midday, after we stayed with Kapp und Westphal. In Twin Sisters last night, and this *abend* finds us with you. I bring you news. I think you get not much news."

"Well, I have heard that *kamerad* Douai has left Texas; that he has gone to the Northern states because of the *Haengerbande. Und* that Stroebbling and Schleicher have joined the *Haengerbande*."

Old Man Wohl puttered with little air fart sounds from his mouth and waves his hand at me as he ducked his white bearded face. "Well, they did not join the *Haengerbande*. They have joined the Confederacy."

"Same thing, *opa*."

He waved his hand again and lowered his gray face. "Yes and no, *Enkel*."

Herr Kuechler spoke again. "*Ja*, *Herr* Schleicher is now an engineer for the Confederates. He will tell the Southerners how to build bridges and such." He eyes drifted away again, and then, with maybe a little raw plum in his mouth, "He was always good at telling people what to do."

'*Ja*, I remember Altgeld's mill in Komfort," I put in the talk. "*Herr* Schleicher is set in his way like an old *putzfrau*. If he had listened to me than the mill would still be working. I told him about the evil river when it rains...."

Old Man Wohl spoke again, waving his old hand again, "All of that is water over the mill." He chuckled at his own joke. Kuechler and me had to laugh also. It was good, for I was beginning to get angry.

But I would be better than that. "Mina my little *liebschen*, would you be so sweet as to bring us some of your fine beer?"

Mina had been waiting off to side, piddling with something or other. I know that she has been listening. But she was happy to respond to me.

After several beers each, I finally get the chutzpah to speak, before that we had been talking small talk-- the war, the Comanches, the weather, the *Kameradin*. So at long last I ask: "So *Kamerad* Kuechler, what brings you to my happy homestead?"

Herr Kuechler turns to see Mina, who has been watching us all this time. She knows that there is men-talk in the air, and I know she does not like it. "Mina, little *Tochterchen*, might I impose upon you to brings us another tourney of your fine beer?"

Mina takes the hint and is off, taking Gustav with her. Gustav would have liked to have stayed with the men folk. Kuechler still has two full beers in front of him.

"You know we will always be the damn Dutchmen to them. They will never treat us any better than they do their Negroes." I was getting drunken and angry. "Maybe this is a good time for the revolution to break out."

Max und Jacob both nodded their heads grimly and more wisely than me, but they did not disagree.

"Very well. I will go with you, Captain Kuechler, and with the other Turnverein." I continued. "I will meet up first with Beckmann in San Antonio to give him the message. But you both know that the Weitlingites there are all comfortable and set in their ways. And then I shall meet you at the der Dutchman's Hole. Opa, you will have to take care of Mina and Gustav. I will tell her later."

Old Man Max nodded. "I would go with you if I were younger, Kleveland. "But I am afraid that the bullet the Prussians put in my leg in Baden would only slow us down."

I nodded. “But Captain Kuechler, I will not sign my name to any muster roll. *Opa* has told me how they used that to capture the *Achtundvierzigers* in the old country when they made the revolution. I will be a *Fledermaus* in all of this, a bat in the night wind. They shall not know who I am.”

Kuechler nodded grimly and wisely again. “Sometimes it is best to keep one’s face down.”

Mina did not like it at all. But my mind was made and my head was square.

That evening we drank some more beer and sang some of the old songs of the *Kameradin*. I may have made too much noise on Douai’s harpsicord, but after all the trouble to haul that thing from San Antonio I was going to enjoy it. I even played some songs I invented that evening, one I even called “Der Fledermaus”. I have combined the music of the Comanche, the Mexicanos, our *Kameradin*, and even some of that of the Texians for some tunes. Captain Kuechler said it was very rocky.

I was able to make San Antonio in three days. I gave the message to Beckmann and the others as soon as I could. They put up the posters around town. But they were comfortable in their lives, these old *Achtundvierzigers* and Weitlingites. They would not join Kuechler.

I arrived late in the evening to rejoin Captain Kuechler. They were camped on the western Nueces fork north of Fort Clark...

And when it was dawn, the *Haengerbande* come looking. The shooting started when I was in the cedar breaks doing my morning business. And I was bare-footed, as the prickly pear reminded me. I did not even have my shotgun. I would have never believed that this would indeed be possible.

I could not believe that they shot them all dead like rabid dogs. The men with the rattlesnake eyes who I had traded with in Frederichsburg, who I had drunk beer and played with their children. Even the *polizei* in Baden never treated us as such.

So I fled. I fled like a *Fledermaus* at the break of day. Behind me I left Hugo Degener, and the Vater brothers, my friends and the others. They could not walk and I could not run with them with me. So I flew. I flew like a *Fledermaus*. I fled like a girlie-man.

“So there you go, kid. That’s what happened. What did you say your name was? Texas U, huh? Tell Nugent I ain’t joining his outfit. I might join up with Bill Farmer’s bunch; they have some good ideas. What is a journalism degree anyway?”

Cleve rubbed his eyes as he took a momentary break from his pile of papers on the shaky card table. His thoughts briefly fluttered towards Amora.

Three stern knocks on the door startled Cleve from his pile of papers on the shaky card table. From the rhythm of the knocks he knew who it was.

"Hello, Amora," he said as he opened the cardboard thin door to his apartment at the old Robert E. Lee Hotel. Sometimes Cleve wondered if he had not created Amora by thinking about her, a figment of his own imagination, one of his own personal tulpas.

Amora beamed at him with her broad toothy smile. Her copper-bronzed face shone with its usual luminosity. "Hello, my dear friend Cleveland. How did you know it was me?" She was wrapped in her characteristic colorful robes; her hair draped loosely about her shoulders.

"I just knew, I guess. Please come in."

She elegantly stepped into his apartment, swirling her robes around her. Cleve immediately cleared a spot on the couch, again casting newspapers, magazines, and dirty underwear together into a pile off to the west.

She plopped down with a sigh. "Ahhh, it is good to see you, my dear friend Cleveland Maxwell. I have missed you."

"Amora, I have missed you too. How have you been?"

"I have been very busy, Cleveland. As you know Balkan situation does not seem to be getting any better."

Cleve nodded grimly.

"I am ready for some of your hospitality, Cleveland."

Without a word Cleve jumped up and hurried to the kitchen. The Crown Royal came down from its secret hiding spot; it was delved quickly into a jelly glass full of ice cubes, wrapped elegantly in a generic paper towel, and accompanied by an orange marigold. He served elegantly, wordlessly, kitchen towel draped humorously on his arm and a smirk draped on his face.

She looked up at him and laughed quickly with tired eyes. "Cleveland, it is so good to see you again", she repeated. "I am glad to see that your work is going well.

"Thank you Amora", he replied, setting the glasses on the card table. "I've been looking at Mr. Tesla's notes that you sent me and I had to brush up on my tensor calculus, and there is still much to be done, but we are now able to apply the data from the synchronicities report at the Keely conference with the musical intervals from the San Saba Sinewave band towards the Balkan situation. The wiring diagrams provided by Mr. Tesla will provide most of the electromagnetic hard-wiring."

"The positronic energy generated and harnessed from the synchronicities should be greatly sufficient to provide all the energy we need. I believe I have found the right megahertz frequency near a quarter tone at Super-C-Sharp which should be the correct transmission frequency. The vibrational harmonics are a little higher than I had hoped at .0000013 but I think it is going to work. And the additional synchronizations from the musical jams will provide a greater input.

“With a little tweeking, we should have everything we need to continue our future efforts.”

“Excellent. Most excellent, my Bishop Cleveland!” she exclaimed, sipping at her glass.

“I suggest a move from Red QB-KR5 to KN6 with a logarithmic intervention from the 7 of spades. I am applying our current geo-physical coordinates of 29.472546, -98.494317 at 212.27796 meters elevation with our temporal coordinates of ~041019851306.32 and this computer’s POP3 IP address. Ready to engage at your discretion.”

“Make it so, Bishop Maxwell.”

“Done.” Cleve tapped the ‘enter’ key on his laptop.

PARALLEL EPISODE

The cat meowed loudly outside the kitchen screen door. One could have sworn from its bray that it was having its entrails torn asunder hair by hair. Its scraggly, flea-bitten frame pressed itself close to the bottom part of the screen.

Humming nervously to himself, Hop Sing bustled about the kitchen, preparing his usual dinner feat for a family of four -- eight if you counted Hoss's appetite. He ignored the cat's whine the first time, scowled at it the second time, and at the third howl lashed at it verbally.

"Go away. Kitchen closed. No take no more cat applications today. Take too many. No room on menu. Come back nex’ week; maybe I need you then."

The Cat, thankful that someone had noticed its shrill cries of starvation, lowered its next wail to a loud whimper. Hop Sing was too busy with his dinner preparations to feed the Cat as it desired; it was to be a special meal for a special guest—the famous Western writer Cleveland Maxwell.

But Hop Sing continued to shout at The Cat over the din of pots and pans. "No care what you say. I small businessman. No take more than I can use. No got freezer. Go back to wobble hall. Go get a job. Besides, you should see my meat bill last month. No take more than I can use."

Hop Sing prattled on and on to the Cat as he finalized his culinary deliberations, happy to be nervously chattering both in his native Cantonese and broken English.

Adam poked a hungry head inside the swinging kitchen doors. "Say, Hop Sing, that was really good rabbit we had last night. When we gonna have it again?"

"Maybe nex’ week, Missa Adam," Hop Sing mechanically replied as he rushed past him with two armfuls of dishes to serve the growling stomachs in the dining room.

Having finished the serving of the hors d'oeuvres, Hop Sing ducked back into the kitchen for a quick break and a quick smoke on his long-stemmed pipe. He inhaled deeply and relaxed a little on his wooden stool. The Cat brawled again, a somewhat subdued, inquiring yowl, making sure that Hop Sing remembered it was there. Hop Sing rolled his eyes.

"Go away, I told you." The Cat whined loudly in response. Hop Sing wearily toked on his pipe and got up, piling scraps and assorted leftovers into a pile in a small wooden dish. He opened the screen door and the tortuous little critter poked a hesitant yet desperate look inside.

"OK, OK, you win, we negotiate contract later. Meanwhile you get bit to eat. Too skinny." He bent down and stroked the cat affectionately several times; the cat rolled its head upwards to meet each stroke, then, confident that there was no immediate danger from man or beast, the emaciated creature bounded over to the wooden bowl of scraps and began devouring them greedily.

Hop Sing continued about his chores, washing some assorted pots and doing his job the best way he knew how.

Suddenly Ben barged into the kitchen, just in from a rough trail ride. The Cat quickly scurried out the door, dragging with it a large piece of suet. "What's for supper, Hop Sing?" he asked hungrily.

"Beef ribeye, Missa Ben. Bake potato, fesh salad. Just like at Bonanza."

"When we having rabbit again?"

"Maybe nex' week, Missa Ben."

Ben grunted, and became more businesslike. "Let's watch the meat bill, Hop Sing. And feed the cat outside."

"Yessa, Missa Ben."

URBAN LEGEND

May Day of 1980 found me on Wall Street in New York City, in a funky little bar whose name I have long forgotten. Heck-of-a-place to be on May Day. I had to meet Amora tomorrow but in the meanwhile an old pipefitter buddy of mine and I had gotten together to make sure that the Big Apple would be painted bright red by next morning.

I was being exceptionally witty that night, more a product of the Rolling Rock than my own charm, I'm afraid to admit, but I had the bartender eating out of my hand---or maybe she had me eating out of hers. She was a strikingly attractive Dutch woman working in NYC while she got her act together as an actress, and she had been buying me beer since ten.

The other bartender was French, and I of course began conversing with him in my best Cajun improvisations, I'm sure also impressing him with my innate wit and country charm. The Dutch woman also spoke French. Unfortunately, as interesting as these two individuals both were, they were far too busy catering to the thirsty needs of the crowd to have any time to sit and chat. I tried to get the Dutch lady's phone number before Jim and I stumbled out, but she laughed in my face: "I never give my phone number at bars," she declared bluntly. "But come back and see me." Her eyes twinkled.

Oh well. It looked like the evening was coming to a close. One more beer would have sent me keetering into the alleyways with some of the best of the Bowery, I'm sure, but I wasn't ready to be doing my first upchuck in Old Gotham. I shook hands with Jim at the Park Place subway entrance and decided to walk back to the apartment in the East Village where I would be meeting Amora in this time period. I needed to clear my head, and I didn't feel like feeding my spare funds to the over-priced subway. Besides, what could happen? After a week in the city following up on the sequences, I was convinced I could take care of myself. I was already jumping subway turnstiles with a style that would have amazed the best of them in the South Bronx. So I

meandered through the side streets of the financial district, reaching Broadway somewhere way below Canal Street. The streets were lit well enough, but there simply was not another person in sight, on foot or in passing vehicle. In the middle of Manhattan? I almost couldn't believe it.

I stumbled along at a fairly steady pace, minding nothing save the sober realities of a drunk. On the far side of the street, I saw them -- looking like Alfalfa, Buckwheat, Porky, and Spanky gone rogue and into business for themselves. And I could tell that their business was less than honorable. They all carried one or another instrument of potential destruction. I couldn't tell what they all were exactly, but one piece looked like an iron from Mother Hubbard's cupboard and another resembled a thick cardboard spool that held the insides of large textile rolls.

If the oldest of them was twelve I was the king of France. The first had crossed Broadway diagonally in front of the others, heading me off at the pass while the others approached my flank.

I knew something was up. I unsnapped the sheath of the Buck knife on my belt.

The one who had crossed in front of the others now stood within steps of me, getting closer with my every step. "Give me your belt buckle," Alfalfa demanded sternly, with bright eyes that spoke of fear and determination as he reached for my silver-plated "Texas" buckle. I slapped his hand away like flies on a cow's ass, backed away from him, right into the swift hand of Spanky, the largest of the bunch, who so very deftly lifted my Buck from its cover and retreated into the horizon of the shadows on the street.

Oh well, I sighed to myself, so much for the bandalero style of self-defense. I reacted quickly enough to take my wallet out of my rear jean pocket and stuff it into the front of my jeans. I *knew* they weren't going to try to reach for it there, or this town was stranger than I thought. I was effectively surrounded now, trapped like a sheep in the face of a pack of wolves, even if they were only cubs.

Well, maybe the best defense was a good offense, I thought, remembering the words of Daryl Royal or somebody. I charged towards the smallest of the crowd. Incredible how that survival instinct will always make you forget your own personal code of Marquis de Queensbury rules. But Porky was quicker than I. He had his own blade flicked open and gleaming in the Mercury vapor lights of Broadway as I stepped close. "No, Cleve, you don't want to do that," the little voice in my head told me.

We were stalemated as we danced around each other on the sidewalk. Finally Alfalfa spoke up. "Give us your money," he demanded. "Give us your money or we'll stab you in the leg."

Well, thank God that was all I had to worry about.

"I ain't got no money," I haughtily replied, buoyed by the fact that I didn't have to worry about losing my life immediately.

"Yeah, you do, it's in the front of your pants. I saw you put it there," blurted Buckwheat, the fourth youth, with all the obvious innocence of a child.

"Well, come and get it then," I antagonized them. "If you want it so bad come and get it."

We danced around each other for several more tedious seconds, pirouette here, sashay there. As I would advance towards one, he would retreat and his knife blade would flash forth; as one moved towards me, I acted like I was going to knock him so hard his whole family would fall down.

They were not going to attempt to move in *en masse*, but in all the discussion and two-stepping, trying to keep them abreast, I had forgotten about Spanky and the big textile roll. I quickly remembered him as the heavy cardboard roll crashed against the back of my head.

Surprisingly, I didn't go down. I was finally drunk enough at the right time. Had I been sober I am sure that I would have been flattened along the pavement. My head sagged forward, but quickly righted itself as if held in place by a strong spring. I

quickly turned on the little punk with a look that would have frozen the water in his tenement pipes.

They were getting edgy now. This was not the Quick Hit they had hoped for. Alfalfa spoke up again. "Man, if you scream we're gonna stab you in the leg..."

So that was their fear. The Law. All I had to do was start screaming. Hey, but wait a minute....Where was my own sense of dignity? Start screaming in fear at the threat of four 12 year old brats? What would people think? Still, the prospect of being stabbed in the leg did not particularly appeal to me. So, still on the offensive, letting my mind work this time, I shouted hoarsely, “If you don't give me back my knife I'm gonna start screaming," Hey, it wasn't *that* low beneath my dignity.

They looked at each other and then back at me blankly, not knowing what to do, but they surely did not want to admit defeat. Spanky bristled with hostility, eyes gleaming like a rattlesnake.

This called for a principled diplomatic approach in reconciling social conflict. "I tell you what," I said, softening in a respectable manner. "I'll give you the money if you give me back my knife."

Three of the gang didn't really want to do that, but Alfalfa barked sharply, "Give him the knife..." He was the Boss, apparently. Spanky continued to stall. "Give him the knife," Alfalfa said sharply again.

I dug into my jeans and dredged up the dollar or so worth of change, subway tokens and assorted nuts and washers that had accumulated in my pocket over the last several days, and held it forth to Spanky, who still had my Buck knife.

He was moving slow with the knife and the band was getting restless. "Give him the knife!" shouted the boss again.

Spanky put the knife in my free hand as he received my handful of pocket change and other urban detritus from my other hand, then jerked back quickly hoping to snare the knife. But my own drunken grip and reflexes held and when Alfalfa again screamed, "Let go of the knife," I realized that I had gotten off the hook.

They regrouped and started walking back over to the other side of Broadway to the shadows from whence they came, as if nothing had ever happened.

"Remember man," Alfalfa called back to me, "We're the Bishops," referring to his gang of cubs. I called after them, like an old man whose roses they had just crushed, "You kids ought to mug some rich people instead of poor folks."

"Ain't no rich people in this neighborhood, man," he replied casually. A new light bulb went off in my head. I guess I was still drunk. "Hey kid," I called across the street.

He looked up. I quickly detached the belt buckle from its leather clasp and pitched it to him across the thoroughfare like a Frisbee. A big grin crossed his face as it landed squarely in his hand.

I burped and stumbled on.

NUCLEAR TRILOGY

1: LIFE INSIDE THE AVIARY, OR A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME: ANOTHER OF MAXWELL'S FABLES

Once upon a time in a land far, far away, there was a giant aviary. To us it was an aviary but to the millions of birds that lived inside it was a large city as well as home. All types of birds lived in the city, everything from eagles, to doves, to chickens, sparrows, owls, ravens, crows, hummingbirds, ostriches -- all the birds of the world. There were Asian birds and European birds, and even some unusual birds like whooping cranes and homing pigeons, but you didn't see too many of those folks anymore. Rumor had it that they all had moved out of the city -- maybe even to the suburbs, but nobody knew for sure.

Life in Aviary City was pretty much like life in any other city. All the little birds had their nests, and they all did something productive in the city: A lot of the birds worked in the construction industry, like the sparrows, making nests and building feeders and such. (The orioles were the most sophisticated builders, building really fancy nests, and they were pretty good at bird-ball, too.) Other birds were into music, like the nightingales and the Byrds, and sometimes they even did concerts for the other birds. Adult birds tried to bring up their little chicks in as good a way as possible, and, for the most part, all of these birds of a feather would flock together. Why, Aviary City even had television, with such impressive celebrities as Big Bird, Admiral Byrd, Tweety Bird, Heckle and Jeckle, and Woody Woodpecker. I suppose that Aviary City certainly had its share of problems, like any other big city; they certainly had to deal with a rising crime rate -- why, those crows and blue-jays would simply steal anything that wasn't nailed down.

No one really knows when the trouble started (some think it was with the invention of the Firebird), but all I know is that after a while, the birds would just hang around their own neighborhoods and get pretty protective about their own trees. Mercy, some of the birds even started street gangs, and would display pictures of Alfred Hitchcock in their birdhouses. Birds began to avoid other types of birds, and would get pretty angry if any other type of bird tried to move into their neighborhood. The eagles started getting protective about their neighborhoods -- and the neighborhoods of other birds as well -- as did the mockingbirds and the roosters and the marlins. It just wasn't the same Aviary City. But life still went on: The chickens would still run away when there was any sort of problem, and the ostriches would still put their heads in the sand when any sort of troublesome issue was discussed.

Then one day an eagle was killed in a dollarov neighborhood (or was it a dollarov killed in an eagle neighborhood?), and before you knew it the hawks on both sides were shouting and shrieking and jabbing the other side with talon-sharp verbal and even physical attacks...nothing to really provoke anything, you understand, but just enough to keep everyone's feathers ruffled. Well, at least the hawks' feathers ruffled: The ostriches would continue to put their heads in the sand and the chickens would continue to run away and the sparrows would continue to go to work (poor folks, though, they really had no choice: the minimum wage hadn't been raised in several years but the price of birdseed kept escalating) and the crows and the blue jays would continue to build their fancy nests and the ducks would continue to work on the lake and the swans still carried on like it was 17th century Royalist France! Lord knows the turkeys continued to put both of their claws in their beaks!

But the hawks on both sides were still keeping everything flustered. "If you don't do something about this," they shrieked at each other, "we are going to turn our firebirds and thunderbirds loose and they are going to run dragstrips all over your neighborhoods and put treads all over your front lawns. You bird-brains better take us seriously; this is no feather-weight competition," and secretly they would add, "We're going to make you eat crow." Both sides would shout this back and forth at each other over the tree limbs in Aviary City. Most of the birds in the

trees really didn't listen to all this cackling, but the owls were getting worried. They could see that something was not right in the state of Aviary City, and they told the hawks so. And the hawks started calling the owls all sorts of dirty bird names, like "dollarov-lover" (or "eagle-lover," as the case might be) and "chicken" and "turkey" and "dodo" and "coo-coo" and "loon" and "pecker" and other names which I dare not put into print. The hawks were always calling the doves these names anyway, but now the owls were getting into the act and the hawks were getting worried. And the vultures were getting worried too, fearing that all this talk might make the sparrows go on strike again.

But, anyway, sadly, because of all of this, one day some hawk in the eagle neighborhood, or some hawk in the dollarov neighborhood, opened the cages of the firebirds and thunderbirds and they took off in all directions. Many of the little birds tried to flee, but they were trapped by the very aviary cage that had once offered them security. And the firebirds and thunderbirds tore up all the front lawns in all the neighborhoods and burned all the leaves from the trees and wind from the breeze and ran over all the little chicks and the old crows and the middle-aged birds 'til every bird in Aviary City was dead and all the trees in Aviary City were charred and there was no life left at all in Aviary City.

The Moral:

So here we sit, all a-flustered
Not knowing shit from mustard.
Should we create such a stink?
Life is more than what we think.

Can't we see day from night?
Is Life just a Big Cockfight
Perhaps someday we will learn
That we don't really want to burn.

Is it time to make a stand?
Why not stop it while we can?
So, write it down, said the owl.
Learn the lesson of the fowl.

2: IT'S A DOG'S WORLD

Deacon Basenji put down his magazine and glanced at his watch. The little Pluto face leered back at him with all the glamour of a Greyhound bus. "Well," he growled, "I guess it's about time to go to work."

"The wife should be home from work soon," he recalled. He wolfed down the hot dogs left in the bowl, nonchalantly licking his chops afterwards. Ambling over to the bedroom, he could hear the triplets whining and yelping quietly in their sleep. He smiled to himself.

The door pushed open. His Newfoundland love had come home. He nuzzled her affectionately. "I gotta go, sweetie," he said to her after the mechanical changing of the guard that seemed to dampen every evening about this time. He kissed her goodnight with their traditional sloppy mouthing of each other and draped his backpack over his shoulder. "Maybe I can get off early tonight," he thought hopefully as he slammed the door behind him. His big paw slapped the elevator button and within seconds he was scurrying on the street with hundreds of others. "Lordy, what a city," he sighed as he bustled along. "It's a dog-eat-dog world out there. An endless rat race." How many times had he thought of moving the whole family down to Texas to live like a bunch of scrawny coyotes on the range? Maybe someday.

He gingerly side-stepped a pile of excrement opposing his path, giving it no thought. The gentle drizzle sprinkling down had turned into a downpour. Deacon dog-trotted to the service entrance of the *Times* building, bumping into Cleve, who worked in advertising.

"Man, it's raining cats and dogs out there," dripped Deacon, as they both shook water from themselves.

"Yeah, I know, I just stepped in a poodle," Cleve replied dryly.

They both laughed heartily. Deacon ran up the stairs to the City Desk, where Huntz was barking out orders as he approached.

"Basenji, good evening. You're gonna cover for Muttford tonight. He's out with a bad case of worms. You're gonna handle the UN."

Deacon's heart danced with all the enthusiasm of a sleeping dog. Old Huntz, that Alsatian son of a bitch, had given him the UN to cover. "Yeah, sure, no problem," he mumbled in reply. With Huntz, you really didn't argue. He had the disposition of a Doberman pinscher who hadn't eaten for four days, especially when someone did not show up for work. Covering the UN meant long hours of making sure that no profound peace escaped from the lips of the delegates without it being reported by the press. They were in some sort of late-night session tonight, so Deacon would have to make sure that his cassette recorder had plenty of blank tapes. Maybe he would even catch a little cat nap tonight, he thought optimistically.

Bounding about on those thoughts, Deacon slurped down his all-too-hot cup of coffee, steaming it all over the hairs of his chin, and took off like a jackrabbit for the UN.

He found himself in the press section of the UN after going through the usual security and dog-tag checks. The British and Irish were going at it once again with all the ferocity of two boxers set to tear each other to shreds. Deacon stretched into his press chair and began to watch disinterestedly, then he picked up a dog-eared novel and scratched through it casually. He had the tape recorder set and running, so after kicking off his Hush Puppies he curled himself into the seat like he was making a nest in tall weeds, finding himself a position of comfort which would allow him some peace and quiet for the evening. He knew that no one would be bird-dogging him, and, after all, he was dog-tired. The British and the Irish were continuing on with all the persuasiveness of a Checkers speech. Maybe he would just do that little catnap. Ahhhh, it was a dog's life....

The minutes droned on. The British and Irish had stopped for the time being, and there was a general hum as the meeting sought to move on but was stalled by the precision of bureaucracy. In any event, at some point the Ambassador from one of those underdog African nations, a brownish Chow with an impressive mane, introduced a resolution condemning both of the superpowers for the nuclear arms race. It happened once a week, at last count, but this time something different happened. Speaking next, the Canadian Ambassador was endorsing the resolution! Deacon cocked his head inquisitively at what the big Labrador was saying, then pricked his ears up even higher when the British representative followed with the same thing: "The British Bulldog family recognizes that the nuclear arms race is not a World War One dogfight. We cannot live with it any longer."

Deacon's nose for news really started sniffing the air at that point. He started making notes on a very definite story, doggedly pursuing his venerable craft like a hunting dog sniffing a scent. He was, after all, a watchdog of society of some sort. The news was being made, and he was covering it like fleas on a dog's back. And it was incredible: Ambassador Huck Dingo of Australia then endorsed the resolution for his native turf. Crouched in their corners, the Russian wolfhounds began giggling like hyenas; then the official Afghan representative, a beautiful olive-haired purebred from a nation officially leashed by the Soviet collar, also endorsed the resolution. They really began to howl with heartworm when the Polish representative did likewise.

Speaking of heartworm, those corn-dogs Deacon had sent for during this time were beginning to rumble in his intestines. "Dog-gonnit, why do I always eat that garbage?" he burped.

The snarling on the UN floor was intensifying with all the relish of the closing moments of a fox hunt. "You dirty dogs," sneered the Saudi delegate to Ambassador Pavlov of the Soviet Union and Ambassador Dogglas of the United States, "you race our lives with your weapons like you race your Greyhounds....You allow your workers to be trampled under your so-called wheels of progress."

And so it continued through the night. Like a ringing bell reaction, nation after nation entered their condemnation of the nuclear arms race and pledged themselves to its abolition. When

the Irish wolfhounds agreed with the British bulldogs, Deacon knew that this was something big and that he might even get an extra biscuit for it at work. The husky Ambassador from Iceland was next, adding his approving barks for the resolution, followed by the diminutive Pekinese from Red China.The cocky well-groomed representative from France, LaCaniche, strutted his finely manicured appearance while joining the votes for the resolution: "We can no longer stand idly by while our dogfaces continue to die for the questionable dogmas of a pack of foaming-at-the-mouth Rin-tin-tins." The big Dane added his viewpoints: "It is time for the purebreds of the world to realize that they can no longer keep us in kennels."

The night continued on with an electrifying buzz of excitement. The snappy little Mexican Chihuahua was followed by the squat Austrian Daschund. One after another they endorsed the resolution. When the German shepherd added his endorsement, you could have hung a "Beware of the Dog" sign around the neck of the slickly-oiled American ambassador. The Russian ambassador Pavlov certainly had nothing to say either. He sat there whimpering like a beaten hound with his tail between his legs. These were really the dog-days for him. He could almost bet on being sent to the pound by the time he got home.

Even the fat old St. Bernard from the Vatican waddled up to speak. Reeking of brandy, he added the crowning touch in judgment of the two superpowers: "Every dog has their day," he slurred, "and those without good tales will have their weak ends."

That was also the crowning touch for Deacon. He yanked his finished article out of the typewriter and rushed out of the UN back to the *Times*. He got his story in and left for the evening.

He walked home casually, enjoying life around him. The rain had stopped and the sky was clearing. He even stopped into Hydrant's for a beer. "Who said you couldn't teach an old dog new tricks?" he happily wagged to himself. Deacon felt good. "Sometimes I even enjoy my work," he continued as he left the bar. The dogwood was in bloom. Was that Sirius he saw up there among the clouds? He again glanced at the grinning Pluto face on his wrist. "I'd better get home or I'm gonna be in the doghouse," he realized, and quickened his pace towards his apartment.

"You know," he thought as he opened his door to the sleepy face of his mate, "I'll bet that them top dogs of the world realize that their bark is worse than their bite. They won't be able to piss on every tree like they owned it."

3: REVELATION

It was Sunday. The rambunctious rhythmic ringing of the church bells ushered worshippers forth from the cathedral as they hurriedly descended the worn concrete steps. In the face of the warm autumn sunshine a gusty westerly wind induced them to grasp onto hats and skirts. The balding, grizzled old man on the corner spoke meekly to all of them as they brushed past him.

"Spare a dime, buddy?"

"Help an old man, miss?"

"I haven't eaten in forty days, ma'am."

He smiled heartily as the last of the green-haired youngsters in obscure leather uniforms emptied their pockets into his greasy cap.

Soon the flow of passersby had idled to a few parishioners chatting quietly among themselves and certainly not to be bothered by a disheveled derelict wearing rags on his feet. The old man glanced at the results of his morning fishing. A handful of nickels and dimes caught the sunlight and sent it sparkling away in all directions. "And only one guy telling me to get a job," smiled the old man to himself, mouthing his toothless gums

together in appreciative smacking.

Seeing the burly cop approaching, lightly swinging his nightstick in a "move-along" fashion, the old man returned to reality and began heading back towards the Bowery and the Catholic Worker house where he hoped he would find a bunk for the evening. The roaring noise of the city scratched at his ears, causing him to wince occasionally at the oppressive volume. The sounds of sirens and shouts, of breaking glass and barking dogs, and the deafening rumble of the passing underground subway -- all combined into a cacophonous crescendo of sickening noise.

At Union Square, where a thick pall of yellowish-brown automobile exhaust hung in the air like a shroud, the old man saw the junkie nodding out in the middle of traffic, like he was being hammered into the asphalt by some unseen force. Traffic bore down on him like lions on Christians.

Coughing and hacking, the old man scurried as fast as his rickety legs could carry him to the middle of traffic, grabbed the junkie by the arm, and escorted him to the safety of the sidewalk. The youth let himself be led willingly as yellow-jacketed taxicabs screeched to a halt, their horns stinging the air angrily, their drivers shouting epithets in a myriad of languages.

The addict stumbled onto the curb, losing his dark glasses in the process. "Man, I don't even care. Just leave me the fuck alone," he said to the old man and the death in his drug-diseased eyes confirmed his statement. The old man set him on a park bench, and shuddered as he walked away. He glanced back once to see the junkie slowly nodding off the edge of the bench and shuddered again. "What hath Man wrought?" he sighed. The sun hid behind a dark cloud.

Taking his shortcut through the crowded tenements overrunning with uncollected garbage, the old wino returned to his neighborhood and recognized some of his friends from the block. Pete and Nebraska were pitching pennies in the damp piss-stained doorway that would double as their motel room for the evening. Near the corner, a middle-aged woman in business dress, disgusted look in her eyes, stepped gingerly around Felipe, who was sprawled out across the sidewalk, head lying over the edge of the gutter. In the near distance the old man could see Willie wiping windshields, whether the motorists wanted it done or not. Thelma the Bag Lady was sleeping on the bus stop bench, her mismatched wardrobe complemented only by the several grocery sacks of her worldly possessions.

Cleve at the Catholic Worker house apologetically told him there were no bunks left for the evening, but did give him a newspaper, guessing well that the classifieds would serve as the old man's bedsheets for the evening.

The smell of stale urine and ripe garbage swirled around the old man's nostrils as he crossed Bleecker Street to the liquor store on the corner. His black fingernails carefully counted out change, and the clerk set down the pint bottle of Wild Irish Rose. The entire transaction passed in silence.

The old man hobbled back across the street, dodging a loud muffler-less truck, and sat next to the softly snoring Thelma. He unscrewed his lunch and took a hefty swallow, and unfolded the newspaper. Death squads and guerilla wars in Central America and Southeast Asia. Religious wars in India. Famine in Sudan and Somalia. Terrorism in Ireland, Paris and the Middle East. Pestilence and genocide in Africa. A mass murder in California. Religious executions in Iran. Domestic unrest in Poland. Earthquakes in Armenia. Murderous riots in South Africa. Bombings in Italy and Spain. Drug-related murders in Mexico and Colombia. Executions in Texas. A lynching in Louisiana. The old man sighed again. A cool breeze of pungent rodent-smelling air sent a covey of aluminum cans spinning and dancing across the pavement in offbeat ragtime rhythm.

And then there were all these strange new gods that appeared in the newspaper more and more every day, names the old man swore he had heard before: Poseidens and Tridents; Titans and

Cruise; Pershings and Polaris; dense packs, neutron bombs, and Star Wars -- and a whole alphabet soup of lesser deities: M-X and B-1; Amraam and Bigeye; AMB, ICBM, and AWAC. "What God had created in six days the war gods were prepared to vaporize in an hour," he thought, continuing with a smug witticism, “Always did prefer six-packs to dense packs." Aloud to Thelma he remarked, "You know, Thelma, if God had intended for us to blow ourselves up he would have given us balloons for heads." He smacked his gums together and cackled at his own wittiness.

Thelma grunted.

The old man took another deep gulp of the cheap liquor and set the newspaper aside. He crossed his skinny legs, and leaned his scrawny elbows on his knees as his brownish-yellow nicotine stained fingers deftly rolled a cigarette from his near empty pack of Bugler. He lit the poorly wrapped butt with the last match of an abandoned matchbook and gripped it tightly between his cracked lips as he attempted to shake the newspaper into straightened form against the Bowery's firm breeze. Toxic waste dumped into the Great Lakes. Political corruption in Chicago. Civil War in Chechnya and Afghanistan. Assassinations in South America. Demonstrations in Japan. Strife in Pakistan. Political violence in the Philippines. War, terrorism, and riots in Israel and Lebanon. "Never thought the Holy Land could be so unholy," he remarked softly. Coup d’état followed by coup de grace in a half dozen other places. The old man sighed again, lines of anguish wrinkling his leathery weather-worn face into a patchwork quilt.

A commotion across the street caused the old man to look up from his paper. Two youths had snatched a young woman's purse and were careening down the street in breakneck fashion to escape from the screams of their accuser. She was in tearful hysterics when the old man's bowed legs reached her. "Are you alright, miss?" he asked her. She stopped her crying momentarily and looked at him in surprise then without saying a word rushed off down the street resuming her angry sobs.

Meanwhile, the two bandits had bowled over Felipe, who had emerged from the gutter only to find himself smashed back down to the pavement by the impact with the purse snatchers. His head bounced once on the concrete and he lay still, crimson red blood oozing from a scalp wound, darkening the pavement to a reddish-black as it coagulated.

"Call an ambulance!" cried the old man hoarsely, reaching the side of the inert Felipe as fast as his crooked limbs could carry him.

After what seemed like eons, the ambulance arrived with a wail. Thelma, long since awakened by the bustle, blurted out to no one in particular, "Twenty-two minutes for them to get here. They're getting better." She coughed, and a yellow glob of phlegm lodged itself on her lower lip for a few seconds before she wiped it away with a musty green bandanna.

Two disinterested paramedics slapped Felipe on a stretcher like so much a side of beef, and tossed the stretcher into the rear of the ambulance. The vehicle then started and screeched down the cobblestone street in a frenzied exit. One of the medics was laughing.

Breathing heavily and with a tired sigh, the old wino sat down shakily and heavily on the bench with a tired sigh, feeling his age, an age he really couldn't remember -- an eternity, it seemed to him. Had life always been like this? He couldn't really remember when it had been any different, although it must surely have been better somewhere along the line. He could almost feel the weight of the whole world on his scrawny back. He sighed again, deeply in his spirit. The sky darkened and a chilled breeze swept through the Bowery.

"I'm ready for the Judgment Day," he declared to himself in quiet exhaustion.

And with that, he stood up shakily, raised his skinny arms, and the heavens thundered.

LOGARITHM 6-7984: TESTIMONY OF NICOTINE JONES TO READERS OF THE LOST ART

"Don't let the door hit your ass on the way out, Jones."

Well, fuck him. Fuck him good. You would figure that after ten years on the job they would pay you more than 14$EU an hour. Ask him for a raise and he lets you go. No gratitude at all for ten years of good work. Well, *fuck him*.

My face contorted with repressed rage. I shot him the bird with stunning menace, slammed the door behind me, and spun on my heel in a paroxysm of fury. Tricity, the secretary-bookkeeper-receptionist, gaped at me in total surprise, questioning me with wide-open Antonian eyes.

"Bye, Tricity," I gruffly called out to her as I stormed across the funky-green silicon carpet. "Take care, give us a call sometime, and tell the Old Asshole to stick it where the twenty four moons of Jupiter never shine." I had to repress the anger in my voice. She probably thought I had zerked out. The airlock closed behind me before she could reply. I was in no mood to sit and chat. I savagely punched the button for the garage and angrily paced around the small compartment, unsaid thoughts jumping to mind. I maddingly punched the wall of the transporter like a frenzied Ruthahanian. Blood oozed from my left knuckles, but I felt no pain.

The airlock hissed open at the garage and I continued my fuming pace towards my 2134 Impala Superwarp-Glide 389zx, still cursing like a Kerrwellian rubbish engineer. I had the engines humming when Tumeric, the garage lot attendant, poked his innocent head inside the airlock.

"Hey, Nick," he yelled. "You wanna buy a number for the Orion 3-Houston game?"

"No numbers today, Tum," I snapped rudely, letting the airlock close in his face with an equally rude hiss. Through the portal I could see his jaw drop loudly to the floor. But I could not worry about that now.

Within seconds the Impala had turboed out of the garage, accelerating rapidly upwards. I could feel the G's pulling roughly at my temples, but I could have cared less. I burned the yellow light at Central Dispatch and followed up by maliciously running the red light at Atmospheric Customs. I could see the security guards flashing the lights after me but I was already doing .002 parsecs an hour -- they would have better luck chasing the wind. I shot them the bird anyway.

Through my starboard porthole I could see Delta Gamma 6 fading rapidly into the oblivion of space. Man, I could finally kiss that sorry-assed asteroid good-bye once and for all. Fuck ‘em. Fuck ‘em all. Let them make their own nanoprocessors from now on. They couldn't do it without me. Damn it, why hadn't I voted for the union in that last election? That would have showed them. I couldn't believe that they would not give me a raise after ten years. I'll admit I probably should not have gotten as emotional as I did and it wasn't like me. In retrospect, dumping the unrecyclable-trashtray in his lap was probably not a good idea.

But I could not worry about that now. A sober thought of reality jagged across my mind. Now what? What was I going to do for work now? What was I going to tell Jessica? I pulled forth my worn wallet and glanced inside with a wince. 16 $EU. The balance of the rent was due, the insurance payment could not wait, and it would be nice to eat a little more than megabeef, potatoes, and parsennian greens. Lord knows I sure wanted to fix the plumbing in the back bathroom.

Then I recalled why I hadn't voted for the union in the last election. The damned company had told everyone they would simply start hiring Kerrwellians if we voted the union in. Me, like the rest, knowing jobs were tight, had believed their bullshit, and had voted against unionization. The next thing we knew they had started hiring Kerrwellians anyway. Well, fuck them.

I was pissed. I pulled into Spaceway Sigma 457 doing at least 8 parsecs an hour, gunning and racing the tach to 10 parsecs as I took out my frustrated aggression on the blameless hyper-celerator.

Suddenly a robotic, static voice cut across my open-wave communicator. "LOgarithm 6-7984, this is the Quadrant Patrol. You are in violation of the Space-Control laws of this Quadrant. Prepare to be boarded."

I rolled my eyes in exasperation and dismay. This was the last thing I needed right now, I immediately slowed the engines to docking speed and looked around the craft to make sure I had left no visible signs of wrongdoing, recalling gratefully I had left the sativa silkweed at home.

The airlock hissed open and the large trooper entered assertively, removing his helmet to reveal his coarse-cut Centorian features, "Could I see your Space-Operator permit, please?", he asked indifferently. His stone hard face betrayed no sense of emotion but only determination in his mechanical purpose. I handed him the license, slumping back into my seat. He looked at it, reached inside his steel mesh vest for a plume, and began etching information on a yellow tablet. "Mr. Jones, do you realize that you were doing 10.4 parsecs in a 7 parsec zone?"

I nodded.

Looking up, he acknowledged my nod and continued writing. "Mr. Jones, I'm going to give you a citation for speeding. Would you sign here, please?" His thick gloved hand handed me the tablet and his other thick gloved hand pointed out the line on the form. "This is not an acknowledgement of guilt. This simply states that you will appear before the Quadrant Magistrate on the stated date to answer the stated charges. Do you understand this, Mr. Jones?" He looked up again, still with stone cold indifference.

I nodded again.

His bio-mech arm clicked perfunctorily as he punched a button and a copy was transmitted to my auto-log. "Please drive safely, Mr. Jones," he stated perfunctorily as he donned his helmet.

I nodded a third time.

The airlock swissed after him and I wadded up the auto-log, throwing it violently against the control console. It bounced harmlessly like a nerf ball and landed amidst the dust of the floorboard. I was ready to strangle something with all my might. I then viciously kicked the bottom of the dash. Pain shot to my brain as toe did not yield to titanium. I started cussing again -- loudly, arrogantly, hostilely, painfully -- bounding about on one foot like a Saturnian sand flea.

Well, shit. After limping back to my seat I took the next exit off the Spaceway and pulled into the garage lot of the nearest Quasar 24 Convenience Store. I raced the engines threateningly before I shut them off. Storming inside the store, I know that I must have scared the holy lights out of the poor Ghani clerk. I grabbed the ten-pack of Kronos and barged back to the counter. "Pack of Prime-Bud Lights," I barked. The clerk snapped to service in undisguised apprehension.

Scuffing my wares under my arm, I hobbled angrily back to the Impala. I revved the engines back to life, only to notice that a craft was blocking my ascent. I screamed like a crazy man into the open-wave communicator, "SIrius 7-7767, this is LOgarithm 6-7984. Would you get the hell out of my way?"

The communicator yarbled back with a Sirian response, one I could not have translated even if I had wanted to, but whose tone was definitely apologetic. I did not worry about it as the Sirian's late model Celtic-7 Nova Hyper-Craft lurched out of my path. I rushed out of orbit and re-entered the spaceway in my same fit of rage.

I had four brews in my bloodstream by the time I made the Intergalactic Skyway at Barnard's Star. My anger had subsided to a depressed frustration, one compounded quantum-fold by the

countless 18-wingers that slowed all traffic on the Epsilon-Zero-Four detour to a comet's crawl. I sighed and gently -- ooohhh, so very gently -- rubbed my big toe. It was swelling to the size of a Martian moon and each flash of pain would again release those thoughts I had not yet faced. What was I going to do for work? How was Jessica going to take this? I avoided the issues and decided instead to distract my attention and pain by plucking discs in the tricorder. The electronic quanta music simply was not what I wanted to hear grating at my ears; and I really needed to be in a better mood to appreciate the Venusian love chimes. I recalled that Jessica had the rest of the tapes and I sighed again, and popped the last one into the tricorder.

Cleveland Maxwell and the San Saba Sinewave -- it would have to do. Suddenly, a Soviet Cadillac Cabin Cruiser lumbered unto the entrance ramp of the Skyway and then cut right in front of me, doing at least 2 parsecs an hour slower than I. I hit my remote thrusters in spontaneous reaction and swerved to avoid a potential collision.

"Get out of the way, you asshole," I screamed into the communicator, soaring around him and accelerating 'til his lights faded back into deep space. "Fucking tourists," I continued, fuming.

The twentieth-century country-western music wailed its mournful cry, and I gustily sang along with the lyrics:

Drunk with my dog in my pickup truck,
Driving around, looking for luck.
My heart is broken and I'm sure blue,
Driving around, thinking of you....

Still wondering what a pick-up truck was, I lit a Prime Bud and let its gentle wave of relaxation flow over me, pushing everything out of my mind that I did not want to be there. A creative impulse struck me....Maybe I could become a country-western songwriter! That would be a nice way to make a living! Words popped into my head and I scribbled furiously on the keyboard to catch thoughts before they also disappeared into deep space:

Sunday Driver, in the middle of the week.
Sunday Driver, quit dragging your feet
Sunday Driver, get out of my way.
Sunday Driver, go back home and stay.

Even the chorus flowed freely:

Well, I'm getting tired of those Sunday Drivers,
Tooting along at 200 miles-an-hour.
Sunday Driver in the middle of the week:
Get off the road or pick up your feet.

Well, I guess I could thank that Soviet tourist for something. I leaned back into the swivel seat and placed my hands behind my head, day-dreaming of rhinestones and those old-fashioned cowboy hats. But again my thoughts drifted toward reality as I realized that there wasn't too much of a market for country-western music these days. Oh well. I would have to think of some other way to make ends meet. Well, I guess I could always get a job at my brother-in-law's space yard, even if it meant carpooling with a bunch of sweaty Kerrwellians.

I sighed deeply in defeat. I was entering the solar system and traffic buzzed around me, forcing me to pay more attention to my driving than to my problems. I de-celled to sub-warp speed, trying my best to get into a better frame of mind before I got home. I wasn't going to take this out on Jessica or the twins.

I made pretty good time, but traffic was stacked up at the toll booth at the Asteroid Belt. I fished around in my pocket for some loose change, not wanting to break one of the few precious $EU I had left to my name, but the fish weren't biting. I reluctantly passed a $LF through the air tube. I had a terrible impulse to run the toll booth, just out of sheer anger and defiance, but I knew that would only make matters worse. Jessica did not need a hubby languishing in a penal colony off the coast of Saturn Seven. I remmed through the booth as my change returned and the gate lifted, muttering under my breath once again....

The control console started beeping in three-quarter time, indicating that I had entered Earth's stratosphere, and telling me to buckle-up. I resumed manual control of the craft and began the several orbital descents that would allow me to get home. At my stop at Skylab 41 I reassured the agent at Atmospheric Customs that I had nothing to declare and no alien fruits or vegetables. I then eased into my final descent orbit, hitting Earthway 56A just before the rush of traffic from the New Orleans/Baton Rouge megaplex. The sun was still high in the west, and my local time clock showed that it was 5:30 p.m. I had not been home this early in a long time.

I took a couple of shortcuts home, zipping past several aerial barges transporting goods to Austin. I could see the sprawling Austin city limits in the distance, with glinting spires that reached to the sky. The western sun shone and glittered in my eyes as I reduced the hyper-celerator to cruising speed. Harper was as I left it this morning -- quiet, serene, still a haven of refuge against the bustle of the city. I coolly dodged the last pine tree and lowered the Impala into the driveway. The engines began their nightly low hum of relaxation, sighing in relief. Home at last.

The dog had strewn garbage across the front lawn again, littering it to resemble the aftermaths of a Mardi Gras celebration. A window had been busted in the garage. As I entered our modest simu-stone dwelling, I could smell the musty odor of burning megabeef. One of the twins was crying loudly from the living room as the other toddled up to me, garbling hello as she wrapped chocolate-covered hands around my leg. I softly laid my hand on the little one's head as Jessica poked her head out of the kitchen. Her brown hair was tousled, and several gooey globs of parsennian puree decorated the front of her flowered print dress. Her soft features bore visible signs of fatigue and wrinkles I had never seen before.

"Oh, Nick, I'm so glad you're home," she cried with a desperate exclamation. "The landlord wants the money by eight or he is going to sign the eviction notice and call the Rent Police -- the insurance company called and wanted to know if we wanted to cancel our policy; and the plumbing went out in the bathroom again and there's shit all over the bedroom floor....She choked on her last words. "I'm so tired ..."

She dropped a ladle and collapsed on my shoulder, holding me tightly as if she would never let go, melting inside me like I had never felt her before, sobbing softly. I held her equally close as the twins began tugging at our legs, babbling in concern.

We both bent down simultaneously, scooped a toddler into our respective arms, and encircled each other tightly once again. We stayed there forever. The twins fell asleep on our common shoulders. Finally I spoke softly. "Hey, honey. Let's go out and get a bite to eat and take the kids to a movie."

Cleveland Maxwell looked up from the pile of documents he was studying, removed his glasses, rubbed his eyes, and sighed.

"Lordy, there must be a millennium's worth of work to do on this case," he remarked to himself.

Indeed there was. As the Bishop of Hearts, he had also been tasked with archiving and documenting all his records and activities to the World Council, and, thanks to the unfinished work of his predecessor, he was also faced with the gargantuan task of researching and annotating the sum total of the world's collective history from C.E. 2343 to C.E. 2454. No small task mind you. Cleve acknowledged to himself that it was going to be a royal pain in the ass, or better put in more modern politically correct terms, a collectivist pain in the posterior.

"I guess it's job security," Cleveland remarked again to himself, almost in synchronous response to this Narrator's narrative. "At least I can take it one step at a time," he continued.

"Well, at least it looks like that Balkan thing may have abated for now,' he mused. "Amora will be relieved. But to be on the safe side I still need to apply those decimal values to the third temporal derivative of that last logarithm to make sure there is no bio-feedback. I should be able to use the coordinates from that last Kerrwellian interface."

He glanced down at the top item on his current pile of archival material. It was time to get back to work. He rubbed his eyes one more time, squinted, and replaced his eye glasses.

The first thing he picked up was an article entitled "The Genesis Nemesis."

Cleveland Maxwell sighed again. "I just don't feel like re-reading about that period of history right now," he mentioned to himself.

He pushed it aside and reached for the next item. "Les Damnés de la Terre". The hand-written scrawl in the margins that had been quickly scribbled by his predecessor noted that it had occurred in the city of Paris, France, Europe, Earth, Sol Solar system, Milky Way Galaxy, sometimes around the year 2131.

"I guess that I'll start with this one, even if it is in the wrong time zone." he said wearily to himself.

He began reading the old manuscript as he reached for the green bottle.

LES DAMNES DE LA TERRE

And so we danced.

As we swirled around the hardwood floor in the smoky confines of Apostoullos' Publicity Show House et Discothèque, her long dark hair furled forth like the stars and stripes in a stiff breeze. Every gyrating motion of her lithe body matched every move I made with my own dance feet. I was exhilarated by the moment; I could tell she was also enjoying herself.

We flopped down at our table, breathless and sweaty at the end of the band's set, Bordeaux's own *Les Enfants du Paradis*, a splendid combination of rock-funk-Provençal music.

"That was wonderful, Lee. I have really enjoyed this. I am glad that we have finally done this", she remarked as she took a hefty sip from her pastis.

I was glad also. While I most definitely had trouble understanding her Eastern European accent, I had definitely been attracted to her for the past two years. Finally I had enough gumption to ask her out for this evening. A great dinner at Renard's in the Latin Quarter, drinks at Chez René's, and this evening of dancing made the moment most spectacular.

I was attracted to her from the first moment I went to work at EuroSpace. I had just applied for the job of project manager there. I know that my patent for the zero-gravity construction level was the only reason I got the job, but I was ready for a change anyway. An office cube was all I got, but it was better than putting up with the bullshit on the Mars *Poste Jules Verne* construction project. Let's face it, no one likes to have to take a crap and have it fly around your face---literally, given the low gravity on Mars---especially when the contractor should have installed it right in the first place instead of trying to shave corners.

Sure, the money was good, but there are some things that money just could not buy. I was a foreman up there on a welding crew, and my men were just as pissed off about everything as I was. Things weren't going to get any better either. Seems like all they cared about was cutting corners. So after years of the same bullshit, and after a stroke of luck in coming up with an idea which would make both me money and get me out of the blue collar stuff, I jumped on the opportunity.

She had been working at EuroSpace for a couple of years before me. She was an atmospheric engineer for the additional Mars ore-gathering stations, being constructed to provide for the increased tyritium and lithium trade market. EuroSpace pretty much had the monopoly on the Martian mining collectives. Neither the United States nor the Russians, nor the Chinese, Japanese, or the South American Investment Community had wanted to invest in the project from the start, but the combined resources of the expanded European Community had the funds and the incentive to take on the project. Mars was rich with tyritium, cobalt and bismuth. Anyway, to get on with my story.

Her cube was next to mine. There was a certain detached professional coolness about her that always prevented any sort of serious familiarity between us. But she was always cordial to me, even friendly in a non-committal sort of way, and I fell head over heels for her from the first moment I saw her. I couldn't let her know that, of course.

So I finally got the backbone to ask her out, this time after my last six-week-long stay at *Poste Jules Verne*, with work stops at *Poste Victor Hugo* and *Poste Cleveland Maxwell* where the new construction was ongoing. So, after being back a week, I asked her in a totally cool way, like, its-ok-if-you-say-no-but-that-I-was-interested-in-you-in-a-non-committal-sort-of-way attitude. I was almost beside myself when she agreed to the date. But of course I didn't let on, not too much, anyway.

"Yes, Karina, I am also really glad that we finally did this. I am having the most fun I have had in years. It is good to take a break from work." I lifted my hand to signal the waitress. "Mademoiselle, une tournée s'il vous plait."

"You know, Lee, I have never had the opportunity to do this, but I have always wanted to. It's just that work is so time consuming..." Her accent trailed off with the last strains of sound from the jukebox. There was a moment of silence in the club, filled only by the quiet humdrum of conversations at the respective tables. It was actually pretty calm in here for a Saturday night. It looked like the band was starting to pack it in for the evening.

"I know, Karina. But it's great to spend some free time with you."

Our eyes met casually, friendlily, but a certain light in her eyes reflected an interest a little more than friendly. But I wasn't even thinking about that. I was still having trouble understanding her English. I just smiled at her with a big drunken grin.

There had always been a strange sort of unspoken psi communication between us. She probably knew that I had totally flipped for her, and that I wasn't a mad rapist or anything; I was just a good ole Texas working boy who happened to be across the table from her in his drunken state trying to be the most gallant gentleman that he could possibly be. She returned my grin with a quick toothy smile, quickly ducking her eyes as if she had seen too much, which was quire probably true; *in vino veritas*, as they say.

What the hell. I could very possibly get shot out of the saddle real quick here, but I was drunk enough to open up to her a little. No pain, no gain, as they say. "You know, Karina, I've been wanting to ask you out since the first time I saw you. I've had an attraction for you since the first time I met you."

Her gaze, which had been following my eyes for my past few words, suddenly dropped to the table in shy embarrassment and she reached quickly for her glass for a hefty draught; she suddenly seemed uncomfortable, shrunken into herself at my very words.

Alright you big dumb-ass, you blew it totally. You really screwed it up worse than a one man rock fight. I wanted to hide. Maybe this was a good time to take the next EuroSpace shuttle to Poste Dumas again.

"Uh,uh, ex-excuse me, for a mo-moment, Karina." I rose stiffly from the small round bar table, stumbled, and triangulated the nearest directions to the restroom.

At the *pissoir*, as I steadied myself with one arm firmly braced against the plaster wall, I continued to cuss myself. Why in the flying cornbread hell did I have to move in on her so quick? Why couldn't I just be cool about the whole situation, even though I wanted her so much? Maybe I come on too strong. Maybe she was too shy. Maybe she has a lover or boyfriend and only agreed to the date tonight because she had a fight with him. Maybe she doesn't like me....

My thoughts were jostled by the drunk that burst into the restroom and crammed himself a little too closely next to me at the *pissoir*. He was a young kid, maybe twenty or so, with an attempt at stubble on his face, wearing one of the currently faddish turban caps one sees around Paris.

He looked at me square in the eyes while he was draining his bladder. "*Monsieur, nous sommes tous les damnés de la terre."* His brown eyes were totally blank, from alcohol of from some of the new explorer drugs I could not say. He had a prominent yellow-orange blistery sore on the side of his cheek. He continued in English, "They have infected us all. We are all damned. The only hope is with the Children of Paradise."

I finished my business quickly and zipped my fly, wanting to quickly get away from the drunk ramblings of this drug-induced psycho. I had problems of my own.

I stumbled back through the sparse crowd of revelers to make my way back to our table. Karina was engaged in conversation with the Nigerian woman at the table next to ours.

Upon my approach, Karina quit her dialogue and leaned towards me across the tiny circle of a table. Any trace of my possible

potential indiscretion was missing from her face; indeed, her countenance was replaced with one of concern.

“Lee," she whispered earnestly as I sat down. She grabbed my hand and looked at me firmly. "I am sure that you have heard the rumors of the space infection." Indeed I had. They had been circulating a couple of days after my return from my most recent trip to *Poste Jules Verne*---an infection supposedly from Mars which was beginning to infect the populace, causing delirium, madness, violent outbursts, and in some cases death.

"Yes, I have. But they are only rumors, probably part of the religious fundamentalist anti-space hysteria. I'm sure...."

Karina increased her grip on my hand and interrupted me. "This lady has just informed me that riots have broken out in the Quartier Latin and that the indentured workers in the 7eme have set up barricades....She also says that the *mairies* of all 26 arrondissements have imposed a curfew...."

The Nigerians were getting up to leave. "It is time to depart; *Bon soir*." The woman called over to us as she gathered her colorful wraps and purse. She smiled with a broad smile. Even in the shadowy atmosphere of the club, an orangish-yellow blemish seemed to glow from underneath her bottom lip.

"I think we should go." Karina announced in her professional, at-work tone of voice. "If there is a curfew, it is best that we return home." She began putting on her jacket.

Well, I guess that was a convenient way out for her from my sloppy methods of social intercourse. Oh well. I had had a good time anyway. Maybe she would forget this whole episode Monday morning.

I left a *pourboir*e for the waitress, who was nowhere in sight. I did notice that the already sparse crowds at Apostoullos’ were getting thinner; the patrons were leaving quickly, even if it was only a little after midnight on a Saturday.

As we tread our way towards the door, a harried gendarme entered the club. His uniform was disheveled, a visible smear of mud blared all over the front of it; his kepi had a noticeable dent in the front right corner. As we passed him, he glanced at us quickly. His eyes had the look of a caged squirrel. He had a bright orange sore on the tip of his nose. As we exited, I glanced back to see what was happening. The cop had engaged the burly Greek Apostoullos in a serious face to face dialogue. The noble Apostoullos looked truly frightened, his walrus mustache quivering. Something strange was happening.

The sidewalks of Boulevard St. Germain were eerily quiet. Not quiet as in total silence, but rather a strange silence unfamiliar to this section of Paris on a Saturday evening. There was auto traffic to be sure, perhaps a few vehicles passing in either direction, but nothing like the June Saturday night it should be. Most of the cafes and restaurants as far as I could see appeared to be closed and dark.

Karina had grasped my arm with her left arm. I glanced at her. Her auburn eyes looked at me in dull confusion. "Are you alright?" I asked her.

Her eyes focused on me, and a certain light of recognition flared into them. “Yes, thank you, Lee, I am just not sure what is going on. Things do not seem right...." Her voice trailed off as she looked across the street.

An ancient Peugeot had screeched and skidded to a stop against the curb. Its driver had bailed out of the vehicle, rolled across the pavement several times, and stood erect, brushed off his clothes, and then went running off down the pavement screaming as if he were being chased by the devil himself.

Karina stared after him, as I did. I guess that my drunkenness finally left me, because right now I knew that something was definitely wrong. I felt a flash of fear in my heart, a feeling that I don’t think I had ever felt before; a feeling that the world was going to end, a feeling of doom I could not shake; a feeling that

I was going to be damned to hell; a feeling that my whole soul was going to be thrown into limbo; a feeling that I had no control.

But my control mode must have kicked in---that little mode that reacts when it has to in a time of an emergency. Like it did when the airlock failed on the Albert Camus shuttle to Station D'Espace Mitterand-3; like it did when that untrained, low wage apprentice had let the Martian atmosphere and soil penetrate my space suit when I was laying out forms in the sands of the Plains of Chyrse two weeks ago.

"C'mon, Karina, we need to get out of here. Something is definitely wrong." I grabbed her hand and beginning pulling her with me towards where I had parked my little Citroen. Her arm offered resistance. I glanced back at her.

“Bien, alors. But if you go crazy, I will leave you." Her soft brown eyes met mine with defiance, the defiance of a child who has been beaten by a parent one too many times.

I softened, and turned back to her, placing my hands on the upper part of her arms. Softly, I said, "Sweet thing, if I go crazy, I *hope* you will leave me." I leaned forward and planted a swift, soft kiss on her full lips. I guess I still had a little bit of drunken bravado in me.

Her lips met mine with more enthusiasm than I had expected. Her arms circled around me and squeezed me tightly in security, and her mouth opened to receive my surprised mouth and tongue. I reached around her to return her grasp and held her close to me as our mouths explored each other for several heavenly moments.

Finally we parted. She was gazing at me with bright, happy eyes. "I love you, my sweet Texas man." Maybe she thought it was the end of the world too.

I was stunned by that, but I was not going to argue. "I love you too, my darling little Czech engineer. I've loved you from the first time I met you."

She smiled at me with a smile that I had never seen from her, a smile that suddenly made me forget where we were and why. Her face was glowing with a beauty that I had never seen. I wished that that the moment would have lasted forever.

But the moment did not.

Suddenly, to interrupt the happiest moment of my life, the doors of Apostoullos's club burst forth in a tangled jumble of human riot. Apostoullos, the harried gendarme, the scraggly youth I had seen in the *pissotière,* and another man fell forth in a mélange of fighting and cussing that looked like a cat fight under a full moon.

"*Pauvre enculé*!"

"*Espèce d'enmerdeur*!"

"Sal con!”

"Va fa enculo!"

The epithets continued, but I did not plan to hear them out. As the quartet jostled on the sidewalk, I again grabbed Karina by the hand. "Let's go, sweetie. This horse play is not for us."

I felt totally cool and in control; I was jazzing out, to use an argot term from the last decade. It must have been the kiss. This time Karina did not argue. We hurried down the *trottoir* of Rue des Carmes as fast as we could without breaking into a trot.

The Prefecture de Police was completely dark. There was not a single light nor police officer anywhere near the building "What in the holy name of God is happening?” Karina exclaimed. Her eastern European accent was thick and slurred, from the drinks or the excitement I was not sure. She was looking at me deeply with a totally lost look.

"I don't know at all. This is really fucking weird." In my own excitement I had forgotten the proper language protocol in front of a lady. She did not seem to notice.

"My phone is dead, Lee. I am scared. I can say that I am frightened. What should we do/"

I was still thinking on my feet. "Right now, I am going to take you home and get off the streets until we know what is going on. If the gendarmerie is not functioning than there is no telling what is happening. If the fundamentalists are raising hell again it is probably best that we stay out of sight."

"I do not wish to be alone tonight." She said it not as an invitation, but almost rather like a prayer.

"OK. No problem." I wasn't going to ruin this with a crude remark. Besides, I didn't want to be by myself either.

We rounded the corner on Rue de Lanneau to where I had parked my *deux-cheveaux*. I was not happy with what I saw.

All four tires were flat on the 2CV, the windows were smashed, and the poly-vinyl top had been ripped to little fine shreds. I am sure that the vandalism was not directed towards me; every vehicle as far as I could see was also flattened and trashed.

"Well, fuck me running through a hula-hoop." Again I forgot my protocol.

Suddenly Karina giggled. "You have such strange expressions sometimes." She seemed to have retained her composure and now appeared to be totally cool, calm, and collected.

I ran my hand thru my dark thinning hair. "These are strange times, Karina. I laughed a little. I guess the alcohol was still playing its games.

In the distance we could hear the familiar *pain-pon* of emergency vehicles.

"Well, let me see." I rubbed my chin with my right hand while my left held Karina's smooth fingers. "The *metro* is out. Every lunatic in Paris will be on it, if they are indeed running at all. We could try to get a taxi if one comes by. My apartment is closer than yours; we could start walking there---it's only about a kilometer or so; if you don't mind we could go there and figure out what to do next. If the land lines are working we'll call the *Mairie*, and probably EuroSpace to see what is happening. Maybe we'll be able to catch the late night information on the *télé,* and we should probably think about getting something to eat; I'm starting to get a nibble on my line. Sweetie, it looks like we're gonna be busier than a one-eyed cat staring at nine mouse holes."

She had been watching me talk, following my English, and when she had at last understood what I said she started giggling again. I will candidly admit that I had laid on the ole Texanisms a little heavy; she seemed to like them and I was intent on impressing her; besides, I really loved to hear her laugh. It seemed to put her more at ease.

"*Très bien*, Lee. I will trust myself to you. I need to let my dog out of the *apartement*, but I suppose I can let that wait." Her nose crinkled slightly; I am sure that it was at the thought of cleaning up mutt muffins.

"I think that it is wise that we stay on the well-travelled streets and try to avoid the small cross streets. There is no telling what is going on."

She nodded in agreement.

"Shall we?" I extended my arm.

She grabbed it with small laugh and we proceed to stroll down Rue de Lanneau. If we could ignore the sirens, the silence was almost enjoyable.

Karina began talking. "I really enjoyed the music tonight. The ensemble---what were they named---oh, yes, 'Les Enfants du Paradis'---they reminded me so much of the style of music I played at the Vienna Conservatory...."

"You played that type of music at the Vienna Conservatory?" I interrupted.

"Well, not at the Conservatory itself, of course. They are very conservative. But after hours with comrades we would experiment with tones and melodies. It was quite enjoyable. I played clarinet and soprano saxophone."

"I played sax, too," I exclaimed in surprise. "Alto sax. Played in a car port band with friends." This woman was definitely making musical notes on my heart.

"The alto saxophone is also a very enjoyable instrument. I really preferred the soprano. It is most definitely the only instrument which approaches the tones of the feminine voice. I could think of something while I was playing and the music would flow forth like words. It would always surprise me. Ingrid, the other girl I would play with, and I....."

She had stopped short, for reasons unknown, but I suspect that she had gotten a psi tinge of apprehension because I felt it too. The boulangerie-patisserie we had just passed was a bare shell; all of its storefront windows had been shattered; not a single pastry remained within the front.

The same held true for the charcuterie next to it and the antique shop next to that. All the windows were shattered; all the lights were dark. Broken glass crunched under our feet as we slowed our stroll to a cautious walk. As I looked about, it seemed that every store front for the next couple of blocks had been vandalized. Even the street lights were had been destroyed. Above us, the apartments sat in dark solitude. Behind us, lights still glowed; ahead all was dark; only the background lights of Paris in the autumn sky illuminated our passage.

I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise. Without warning or explanation I grabbed Karina by the waist and pushed her towards the street.

I saw the dull glint of the butcher knife as it sliced the air too near to us. Several locks of Karina’s raven-colored hair severed in midair and fluttered to the pavement. I again pushed her behind me roughly; I think she might have stumbled over the curb and fallen flat on her back in the street. But couldn't worry about that now.

The blade swished through the air again. I jumped back and felt a sharp pain across the palm of my left hand.

The butcher knife swung again. This time I could see its owner, a pudgy older man with balding, graying hair, eyes glowing with the hatred of a rattlesnake and several orange sores around his mouth. I caught his downswing of the knife with both hands and reacted by kicking him squarely in the groin.

He crumbled with a shriek. "*Voleurs! Aux Voleurs! Assassins! Au secours*!" The knife was still in his hand. I grabbed his knife wielding wrist with my bleeding hand and quickly punched him three times in the face with my right fist. He was quickly silent.

"Lee!" Karina screeched.

I turned around to see another figure rushing at me. I crouched low, caught the figure in the midriff, and lifted him over my head, letting his inertia do most of the work. He landed on his back with a dull grunt and lay still. My bar fight training had paid off.

Karina was pulling herself up from the pavement, her short skirt revealing long shapely legs and skinned knees.

I helped her to her feet with both hands, apologizing profusely to her at the same time. “Karina I'm so sorry I knocked you down...I was just trying to get you out of the way...."

She raised a hand to my lips to silence me. “I know." she said quietly. "Thank you."

Her raised hand had blood dripping from it, and I realized immediately that the blood was mine. The cut in my left hand was not too terribly serious, but it was bleeding profusely. I ducked away from her briefly and wrapped my old bandana around it tightly. "It’s OK. But I really think we need to get out of here...."

"*Aux voleurs! Assassins*!" The old fart was beginning to regain consciousness. In the dim shadows of the cobblestone street I could see that his accomplice was also beginning to stir from his resting place on the pavement.

"Let's go!" I grabbed Karina by the arm and we began running down the street towards the lit section of Paris several blocks away.

We ran until we were out of breath and fell against a tattered kiosk, breathing heavily. A bright orange-and-white fire truck raced by us, screeching as if it itself was on fire. Towards the Seine an ominous flickering orange glow was reflected against the cloudy Parisian sky.

We continued the rest of our trek towards my HLM building without major incident, save perhaps for the taxi driver who raced by screaming obscenities at us in Arabic.

My apartment building was dark and silent. I wasn't sure if my neighbors had fled the city or were cowering in the dark, but I was not going to go door to door to find out.

The elevators were not working. We stumbled up the stairs in a rush to my flat. I unlocked the door quickly and we rushed in, slamming the door shut behind us. I also quickly locked the three electromagnetic locks on the door.

We flopped down together on the couch. I energized Le Tube and began scanning mindlessly thru the channels.

Karina had shed her jacket and had slumped in the couch, a blank look on her face. She brushed her hair back several times with both hands as we sat there. Finally she spoke, "What is the news?"

I focused and began to seriously go thru the channels. Groucho Marx on 23, Comic Sphere on 24, 25 blank, 26-31. Blank. TV Luxembourg had the test pattern, Paris 1, 2, 3, 4 were offline. Paris 5 was repeating a broadcast, "*Evacuez la ville le plus tot possible.*" While I was scanning, Karina remarked. "If you do not mind I would like to take a shower."

I nodded as I surfed thru the *télé* but my host caught me. "Karina, I have some clean clothes here you may want to wear."

I dropped the remote and went to the tiny studio's closet, emerging emerged with a t-shirt, socks, and a light gray fleece suit. She nodded thanks and exited into the *salle de bain*.

While she was showering, I continued to glance through the *télé*. It appeared that all the Paris stations, with the exception of the pre-recorded cable channels, were off line. I finally picked up a news broadcast from Télé Fontainebleau.

"*Les incidents d'incendie à Paris continue. Le Président Jean Luc De La Montaigne annonce que l'Armée est intervenu...."*

So whatever had happened, Paris was pretty much under martial law. Saw it once during the worker-student uprising of '23. Wasn't a pretty sight, but then the French riot police and military were not really known for their acts of kindness. Maybe it was another one of those protest things.

Most of the other live stations were off the air, not really unusual at this time of the morning.

The land line was working and I tried calling the office. There was no answer, not that I expected any at three in the morning on a Sunday.

Karina emerged from the *salle de bain*, dark hair wet and clothed in my appropriated misfit outfit, still clinging to her at extraneous points from the shower.

"Have you heard anything else?" she asked formally, as she approached the couch. She had no doubt spotted my attentive gaze.

I gave her a recap of my video investigation. She appeared attentive as she listened, toweling her damp hair as I talked.

"There is a lot of strange things going on. Paris is under martial law; De La Montaigne has sent in the army; there are no television broadcasts in the Paris area..."

Karina continued trying to use her phone. She had had about the same luck that I had had. There was no outside communication.

Finally she spoke, “I hope that you do not mind if I ask that I spend the evening here. Normally I would not ask you of this, but I do not want to spend the night alone."

“Karina, you are most welcome to stay here as long as you want. Until we know more I do not think it is safe to be outside. Let’s see what happens in the morning. I have plenty of food. We will then have to worry about getting your dog out.”

Her nose again crinkled at that unpleasant scenario.

I got up to go into the bathroom to get rid of some of the alcohol. The mirror was still fogged up from Karina’s shower. I cleared the mirror with my bandana-wrapped hand.

There was someone else in the bathroom. I saw their reflection in the still foggy mirror. They had several orange-yellow blisters around their face.

I yelled and swung as hard as I could at them. My fist collapsed against the mirror and glass shattered everywhere.

My hand was definitely broken in several places. I screamed like a wounded bear, not only from the pain and the sight of blood, but also from the sight of those yellow pimples on my face displayed in the multiple shards of the mirror.

And, suddenly, in a shocking revelation, it all came back to me. It was me I had seen in the bathroom. It was me. It was me. It was me who busted the mirror. It was me. And it was me who had brought the infection back from Mars when that orange Martian soil had entered my suit. *It was me.*

I began to laugh and cry all at once. It was me. *I had damned the earth.*

The last thing I remember was Karina’s heel as it bolted out the apartment door.

THE HUNGER CHRONICLES

August 9, 2092. After the surprise raid by the Bulverde invaders last week, things have returned to near normal. I am sorry to report that the raiders did manage to steal several stores of corn meal that we had been trying to save, and this will most certainly be a problem this winter. From what I understand from Tony Guttenberg of Twin Sisters, they have pretty much devastated most of the land between here and south of the county line, taking everything in their path that could be eaten. Our community here at No Le Hace lost several men in repelling the attackers: namely two of the Richardson boys, Octavio Hernandez and Gus Crabtree. There are that many less of us to do a lot of the farm work.

On the way back from the fight, I found an old typing machine in a burned out building near the old Fischer community. It needs a little work and most certainly was quite a chore to carry back to No Le Hace, but with it I have been able to write down some of these thoughts. Maybe someone might even read them some day. Paper may be a problem in the future, but for now I am able to find some in the unused portions of some books and other assorted places. I look for it every time I go out hunting. The biggest problem is actually finding the time to write. I dare not take off too much time from our chores; any delay could cause us to lose a meal, but I do sneak in a few words at the end of the day while we still have daylight.

August 11, 2092. Came back from hunting near Henly. One of my snares caught a skinny dog, but I think there might be enough meat to feed the community for a couple of days. We might also be able to salt some of it for this winter. Also found a few old canned goods that seem to have been missed by all the hunters that have passed through there.

It is a good thing that we have all banded together here at No Le Hace. Had we tried to survive individually, like some of the other communities, we would have long ago gone the way of those other communities: killed, driven off their land or forced to live elsewhere. I guess I should thank my great-grandfather for this---According to my gtranddad, he always preached cooperation as opposed to individual and personal competition. It is by his wisdom that we still live in the same house that he and his father built many decades ago.

August l9, 2092. There has been some talk of going into Oak Hill to see if there is any chance of getting food there. The last group we sent out there last year never came back. I think that they may have been killed somewhere along the way. And from what we are hearing from some of the refugees, there is a sickness of some sort in Oak Hill, probably from the old microchip factory, which we would not want to spread out here. It might be the same sickness that has affected my baby son Thomas. He has been running a fever for several days now and there is not much we can do to keep him cooled off except fan him. My wife has been spending her days doing this. The alcohol in the mustang grape brandy helps cool him a little when we bathe him with a damp cloth, but we are almost out of that.

August 20th, 2092. The water tank is drying up with all the summer heat, so we have decided to cut back on the watering of the few crops that have survived the heat. We have begun bottling as much as we can; hopefully it will keep long enough. The corn is drying out too soon, and we will have to harvest it before it dries out completely, even though the ears are not anywhere as large as they should be. The potatoes are not doing well at all. Beans are beginning to dry out; there isn't anywhere near enough of them to feed the family. Hopefully the drought will break.

August 21, 2092. My baby son Thomas is not getting any better. His fever is still high. Sometimes he does not even take my wife's breast, just pushing it away and screaming with that terrible cry of his that never seems to stop. I have been sleeping outside in the old car to avoid his cries. Sometimes I wish that he was out of his misery. Sometimes I wish I was out of mine. I can do nothing to help him, which wracks at me like you cannot imagine. My wife appears to be taking it fairly well, but I know she is

dying inside. I wish I could do more for her and the boy, but what? What can I do? I cry quietly when I am away from her, sometimes crying myself to sleep, but the next day is still the same and I am back busy trying to collect food, tend the crops, collect bugs, and tend to my traps, and especially trying not to think where the next meal might be coming from. Not that there is anything in the traps anyway.

August 22, 2092. We are making the last of our share of the dog meat. We are making it into a soup with wild onions, acorns, and a dried gourd. Combined with the cedar-berry and silverfish salad, we almost were full. Little Tommy still is not eating, only stopping crying when sleep overtakes him.

August 24, 2092. Our Justice of the Peace Cleve Maxwell banished a man from Johnson City today for trying to steal corn from our storeroom. We will run him out of the county tomorrow. A crowd from Johnson City arrived in the early evening threatened to burn every home to the ground if we run him off, and they certainly have the people to do it, so Judge Maxwell commuted the sentence, saying that next time Johnson City tries to steal anything from us that No Le Hace will be legally allowed to shoot first. There was a cussing match and a brawl, prompted no doubt by the hot weather and even hotter tempers, in which I most certainly received my equal share of blows, but I not sure that we will be doing any more commerce with Johnson City.

August 25, 2092. I took the day off from food gathering. We have enough for the next day or so. I am still sore from yesterday's fight and I needed to rest. I found an old book at the Byram Ranch which I have been meaning to read. I mention it here because the writer predicted, way back last century, that the world's food supply was approaching critical levels. He was some sort of scientist; he said that because of the global heating the phytoplankton in the ocean were being destroyed by ultra-violet rays, and being that they were the base of the world's food supply, and being that the UV rays also seriously affected plants and their growing, that the world could experience a slow death by hunger if the trend continued. I am not sure what to believe, but the evidence around me leads me to think that the scenario of the scientist was true. It's hard to believe that last century they poured out milk in gutters just to keep the price of milk up, and that the family pet was fed table scraps. Food is the money now, and no one has much of that. No one has any milk that I know of, and the family pet has long since become the family dinner.

I gave up on trying to raise chickens years ago---they kept disappearing at night. Besides, no one has any more eggs for hatching. No one has any more chickens, either. The drought is not helping things. We have not had a good rain in over a year. I fear that we are all doomed to a slow death.

August 28, 2092: All of my bean plants have been uprooted and stolen. There is not a trace of them left anywhere. What little was left of the corn is also gone. They left the shitty potatoes. It is a good thing that I managed to harvest most of the corn before this happened. I am sure that I would kill the person that did this if I could find out who it was. It might have been the Johnson City people again. Or then it might have been anyone else....No one can be trusted any more.

August 29, 2092. Clancy Joe Byars tells me that one of the Gutierrez kids got real sick from drinking from a puddle of rainbow colored water down on Miller Creek. Old man Byars ain't in too good shape either. His skin is covered with festering sores that I make a point to avoid, the same type of sores that my mother and sister had had before they died. I gave him a half-can of corn meal after he begged for it for several minutes.

August 29: The meal consisted of a small pot of mashed night crawlers and moths mixed in corn meal. Only the additional salt made me able to keep it down. My wife threw hers back up. When she wasn't looking I went back and ate it. Little Tommy has been asleep for two days now, breathing very erratically. I fear that he is not long for this world. I hope that he is not long for this world.

September l. The old fat traveling minister, Lawrence Ameringer, dropped by on his sporadic tour of preaching the

Gospel in exchange for a meal. After listening to his quiet sermon on faith and how the believers would be saved, he wolfed down the two pieces of cornbread and leftover dog stew broth, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and proceeded to waddle up the hill to the Johnson's. He probably ate better than anyone I knew. I went outside and threw up. Not that there was anything in my belly except a knot; I guess that there were some things that I just couldn't stomach. I had quit praying a long time ago. I only tolerated the bleatings of the fat preacher out of pure and simple politeness. My faith was gone, although I did say a silent prayer that Little Tommy would suffer no more. I can't believe that my God would allow this. This must be Hell; there is no other way I could rationalize it. But what were my sins? What were the sins of my wife? What were the sins of the Gutierrez kid? And what were the sins of little Tommy, unless being born in a land and time of famine and suffering were a sin in and of itself?

How could that sorry fat minister even dare talk about faith? Where was he the last time we were hunting or weeding the crops? Where was he when the raiders from south of the county line were literally stealing the food from our mouths?

September 2. Little Tommy was cold and hard this morning. I am happy that he has passed into a better place. I went to work as soon as I could; I could not stand to hear my wife cry. I was able to find an old can of dog food near the Miller Creek bed, and put it in my bucket along with the dried gourds and handful of blackberries that had escaped discovery.

Sept 2: I have no life left in me. I wish I were dead, but who would take care of my wife? No one is willing to undertake the responsibility of another mouth to feed. She has no life left in her either; I believe that she is waiting to die.

I ran into Cleve Maxwell on the top road and he said that there had been riots in Johnson City over food distribution. Apparently the people in charge of the food were taking more than their fair share. A mob lynched two of them and the city has divided into several different armed camps. I hope that they leave their problems in Johnson City.

Sept 3: My wife has returned somewhat to her former self, and has busied herself with grinding the corn and readying meals, and even managed to give me a loving, if weak, smile. It gave me a little more energy to see that smile. And as luck would have it, Old Man Clancy Joe Byars dropped by with a full can of corn meal to repay us for what I had given him earlier. He also brought by a bottle of fermented prickly pear juice. The taste was very bitter, but it put me in a much better mood. As I write these notes, I find a little strength and courage to continue. It must be the essence of human nature to continue in spite of hardships and deprivation. When it rains again we will have a good crop and we will be able to make it another year. Mike Johnson has started his distillery and we will be able to have clean water for an unlimited amount of time. By building a large mound of rock and stone over a strange assembly of old pipes and collecting the condensation from it every morning he is able to gather a few gallons of clean water for drinking. We may have enough to water crops and all of us are now building similar rock pyramids to generate this seemingly miraculous supply of water. Lord knows there are plenty of rocks around here.

I must leave these notes now. My wife is calling at me that Little Tommy is ready for supper.

WAR ROCK

We were being hit hard. All the hate that could possibly be expressed on this sorry God-forsaken asteroid was coming down in a fury on our heads.

The withering artillery fire from the Canadians was annihilating everything that moved. Everything that didn't move as well.

I was trying to eat the cold mush of one of the plastic MRE containers from the inside of the hole in the orange dirt that had been my home for the past two weeks. The mush would fall off my fork with every reverberating shell.

A few hundred meters to the west the large guns from the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company artillery were throwing back just as much vengeance and wrath as was being reeked on us. Each thundering sadistic orgasm would throw yet another wad of destruction towards the unseen enemy.

A neutron shell shrieked and landed close by. I jerked convulsively inward, like a turtle retreating into its shell, as everything around me quaked uncontrollably for several long seconds.

When the noise had ebbed, I poked my head up and briefly glanced around my surroundings. The four men who had been in the few holes down from me were no longer there; their holes had been replaced by a larger more massive excavation.

About twenty meters to the north in the direction of the Canadian lines I could see a space helmet sitting upright on the shredded terrain of Lexicon 6-1, this 3000 kilometer wide rock in the middle of the Kepler Belt which had been my abode for the past six earth months. The helmet looked like it had a body below it buried up to its neck. Inside the helmet I could see the head of Martinez, looking strangely more peaceful in death than he had been in life.

I barfed right there in my food can.

What was I doing here? Fighting for General Electric against the Canadians to see who would control the liquid lithium pipelines? Last week we were fighting Verizon for the same thing and the Canadians were fighting the Nebraskans for the access to the mines. Next week we'll probably be fighting the Nebraskans. Or maybe we will be fighting Colorado Fuel and Iron again.

Six months ago I was an electrician in a hospital at Poste Cleveland Maxwell on the Cydonian Plains. Suddenly I find myself sub-contracted out by EuroSpace to fight people I have never met.

The shelling had stopped for a few moments. The silence was eerie, deathly--- probably in part to my own loss of hearing from the shelling. Slowly the cries of the wounded on both sides could be heard. They would continue to cry until they died; workers comp insurance was not a benefit in this conflict.

The silence could only mean one thing—an infantry charge was about to happen. They told us we had to hold this section of the pipeline at all costs.

"I said on your feet, soldier", a gruff muffled voice said.

My head was still ringing from the neutron explosions; I could barely hear his words. I looked up to see the young preppy job superintendent Whitey Youngblood in his crisply pressed orange and black camos. Youngblood was standing with the foreman.

I slowly crawled out of my hole to face them. Dirt, rubble, sand, and pieces of metal fell off of me as I faced the two supervisors. I brushed the debris off of my ground suit.

Youngblood was sputtering something. I could see spittle coming out of the corner of his mouth through the visor of his helmet. "…not running a nursery school"…"must have military discipline"…" "time is money".

I was barely hearing what he was saying. My head was still ringing from the concussive effects of the shelling. And the vomit was still lodged in the back of my throat, tasting vile and bitter.

I coughed up a large glob of phlegm, vomit and snot and spit it out.

The gooey blob landed on Youngblood's finely polished right boot.

Youngblood's face turned a deeper orange than his camos. The spittle in the corner of his mouth had turned into steady drip as he hurled epithet upon epithet upon me, my parentage, and my race. His gloved hand had curled up into a tight fist and I was sure he was fixing to strike.

My head had quit pounding for few seconds as the military training they had pounded into me kicked in. I casually swung my PAR-44 to where it was aimed at his legs.

He abruptly turned on his heel and stormed back to his traction lift. It was probably for the best.

"Now you've done it." The foreman shook his grizzled gray head slowly. He took a long draught from a hidden flask, still shaking his head. His hand was shaking as well. "Their infantry is advancing. They want us to hold this section of the pipeline at all costs." He wandered off after another drain from his flask towards the next group of trenches.

From the burnt orange rise to the northeast the Canadians began advancing. There must have been hundreds. They were all clad in the same orange and black camos that were provided to us, I supposed all purchased from the same J. P. Stevens manufacturer in Ghana.

The Canadian advance was slow and calculated, a literal crawl as opposed to a charge. There would be no air cover for us, we had been told, for fear of damaging the pipeline. This would not be pretty.

They were getting closer and closer. I readied my PAR-44, lining up the laser sights on one of the slow moving figures.

Suddenly my target stood up amidst the dust of the battled earth and raised their arms. They removed their space helmet with both hands, and then casually tossed it to the side.

Good God, she had to be at least 70 years old.

She threw aside her firearm and began trudging off towards the east, casting off pieces of gear as she walked.

The din of the battle had stilled as she walked further and further into the distance.

Suddenly I found myself rising out of my hole and tossing down my weapon. It was time to put an end to this. As I tossed my helmet to the red earth, I could hear Whitey Youngblood screeching in the headset. I spit out another glob of phlegm and bile and began to tred after the granny lady.

I looked back once. Behind me I could see scores of orange and black camos on both sides of the trenches following me.

THE WRITER

1. THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

I loaded the typewriter slowly, methodically setting the paper level to the maximum amount. I had serious and ugly work to do tonight.

It wasn't my idea, but They wanted this mark burned and wasted. And now. The Free Press and the Free World could wait no longer. I'm in a dirty business, but someone has to do it.

But one of these days I was going to retire and just write church bulletins or something.

I checked the cartridge slowly, making sure it was well polished. The keys were all well primed, and I was confident that the "h" would not stick when I needed it most.

The paten was sleek and brand new. I had replaced it especially for this special contract. The new ribbon smeared a breath of carbon on my fingers as I slowly loaded it into place.

My fingers moved lightly over the keys, checking the springs and recoil of each. There would be no time for long re-writes or reloads on this job. I had to make this hit count. The bolt action of the return bar was polished and shiny. This evening the quick brown foxes and lazy dogs would not be snared in the rusty rut of caught typewriter keys. There would be no tired hunt-and-peck tonight; Cleveland Maxwell would do his dirty duty with deadly determination.

For the fourth time I wiped down the barrel with a chamois cloth. For the fifth time I lightly swept the wood and ivory stock, admiring the three notches engraved in the side of the machine. I again stroked the stock affectionately as I mentally double-checked my check list: The newspapers were ready; my anonymous tips would ensure that. I even had the dictionary opened to the page where I might have the most trouble.

I glanced over to my pile of ammunition. Two reams, and I had an equivalent number of Number 10 envelopes to shoot them off with. A quick look to my front pocket displayed the two boxes of extra clips of pen cartridges that would serve as my reserve ammo in the remote case that my ribbon belt would fail. I had everything readied and prepared in front of me -- correction fluid, erasers, staple gun, compass, sharpeners, and three back-up note pads.

I could expect no help from the Book Club on this contract. It simply was Too Big and Too Hush-Hush. I was on my own. And I had to make sure that my work was done accurately -- I would not have the chance to do it twice. Every adjective would have to be fired with deadly accuracy at the heart of my intended hit.

I fired a few rounds into the wood pulp to test the sights and the cartridge ribbon. Small black marks splattered unto the fleshy white bark of the page in a myriad of languages, proving that my shift-lock was still pulling to the left, but that would have to do for the time being.

I was getting fidgety. This was going to be a nasty assignment, but it had to be done. I had to make the world Free for Democracy. It was going to be a long night.

I sighted down the keyboard and fired my first round:

"Dear Democrats and Republicans: A plague on both your houses...."

2. THE REBUTTAL, by B.M.

Well, it's about time that sorry drunk asshole quit pounding on my keys like the whole world was going to end if he didn't. Can you imagine what it's like to be rudely awakened by a jolt of electricity, having your slide return roughly slapped upside the head and expected to produce eighty words a minute at the touch of a shift button? Hey, I'm the type that needs at least twenty

minutes to warm up in the morning, maybe even grab a cup of WD-40 and brush my gear teeth.

Then he has the nerve to complain that the "h" is sticking, that the "r" isn't showing up at all, and that the shift lock is pulling to the left. The jerk has got a lot of gall. Here I was double-spacing and I didn't even know I was in capital case.

I'm B.M. I'm a 1956 IBM Electric Typewriter, and I've got a few things on my mind. Like, why did he lie about putting in a new ribbon? I'm still wearing the same one I had last summer, and for a fashion-conscious piece of equipment like me this is really an insult. Then he complains that the "r" isn't showing up. Well, just when am I going to get that new ribbon? Hey, or how about a good key cleaning? Is that too much to ask? Or how about a quick dusting? But nooooo.

And then all the overwork; I just can't stand it anymore. I work all day, ten, twelve hours, and he has the audacity to come back at 11:00 p.m., zap me with electricity, and expect me to produce several masters theses and other articles at ungodly rates of speed. The safety violations are just horrendous. I really should drop a few lines off to OSHA, or better yet, I should join a union. Where are the Wobblies when you really need them? You know, it's like he doesn't even care about me. I can't even get him to blow the dust and paper scraps off the rollers, and it sure is uncomfortable to be itching and scratching like that all day long. Oiling? That went out with the Energy Crisis of 1974. Do you realize that I have not had my margins reset since 1968? I just have this terrible feeling that he is going to squeeze every last bit of use out of me and dump me for one of those plastic-coated word processors.

But what really got me was that pitiful article he just wrote. Not only is it your usual social-democratic oh-nukes-are-bad-for-you horseshit, but he makes *me* look like the Bad Guy. *I'm* the one blasting paper to pulp with my eighty rounds a minute. *I'm* the one throwing word grenades. *I'm* the one with the smoking paten in my holster. For the record, I'm an anarcho-syndicalist Ghandian pacifist. He's not going to lay any rap on me.

Also for the record: He never did replace the paten. That's another boldfaced lie. I should know. I'm still wearing the one they gave me in the factory in '56.

I am not going to put up with his petty-bourgeois, revisionist platitudes any longer, especially with him not giving a damn about conditions at home. Ain't that just like a Boss? In fact, I think that I've had about all I can stand of his crap.

I'm going on strike. I'm going to shut this sweatshop down right now

%%%&*%??!!**))&&&^**%%$$#@@@$$##((*&^%^$#))^

3. THE EDITOR

The cold mechanical face looked into my eyes at nose level, less than three inches away from my face. Its lip sneered upward in sadistic contempt.

"You realize, Mr. Maxwell, that vee haff vays of making you write. Und vee vill not hesitate to use them if you fail to cooperate."

I struggled helplessly against my rope-bound limbs, straining the bruised and battered muscles of my body. He slapped me again.

That was it. "Oh, OK. I'll write. But I'll need a few things."

"I knew that you vould see things our vay, Mr. Maxvell." The face retreated upward to standing level. "Vhat vill you need?"

"Two packs of cigarettes, some scratch paper, a new typewriter ribbon, and a twelve-pack of 16-ounce Budweiser cans. No bottles. And make sure that you don't get the 12-ounce cans. I can't work with 12-ounce cans."

"Very vell." The face spun on its axis and faded out of sight.

A half hour later my arms and legs were free and I was drawing deeply on a cigarette -- generic, no less. You would have thought that they would have at least given me a good brand. The face reappeared, leering over my left shoulder, perched like a crow. "Vee are vaiting for you to begin writing, Mr. Maxwell." It again leered at me sardonically, reminding me of what might happen if I "failed to cooperate."

"Alright, alright." I began to type.

> Roses are red
> Violets are blue
> Dimples are cute
> And so are you.
>
> Violets are red
> Roses are pink
> I smelt your bloomers
> And man they sure stink.

The crow was back on my shoulder, roughly tapping my black and blue brain with a strong bony finger. "Do not take me for a fool, Mr. Maxwell. I vould be more than happy to pluck your brains in my own manner. You vill tell us vhat vee vant to know."

"OK, OK. Just get off my back. I can't work with you standing over my shoulder like this. And these generic cigarettes. They're disgusting. I should call OSHA about this. The least you could have done was get me a pack of Luckies."

The face again retreated out of sight, and called down from above my head, "I vill see vhat I can do, Mr. Maxwell. But do not take me for a fool....If you have not written something by the time I return, I vill personally exercise my own information gathering techniques."

Visions of mind-battering sessions laced with buckets of salt water and water boarding shot through my mind. I shuddered and began typing again:

> The cat meowed loudly outside the kitchen screen door. One could have sworn from its bray that it was having its entrails torn asunder hair by hair. Its scraggly flea-bitten frame pressed itself close to the bottom part of the screen

I sat back in the squeaky wooden chair and took a long draw from the cold beer. There, that should satisfy old Crowface, I thought. Meanwhile, I could put things off a while. My deadline wasn't 'til midnight.

Something entered the room. The crow was back, again leering over my shoulder, peering down to the keyboard and my typed word....

Suddenly it began flaying me with both hands. "This is not original material, Mr. Maxwell. This is *plagiarized* material, you fool." The hands continued to slap my face from all sides.

"I warn you, Mr. Maxwell. You have had two strikes. One the third strike you are out. Do you understand me, Mr. Maxwell? Out. Out! OUT!"

I recoiled from the blows of his words, and suddenly became very serious. "Alright. I'll tell you what you want to know. Just leave me the fuck alone."

The face disappeared. I lit one of the Luckies and began typing yet a third time:

> Hobnailed boots clicked on the shiny tile floor of the operating room. The busy silence of medicine was briefly distracted as a nurse moved to give a surgical mask to the bearer of the boots.
>
> "Scalpel."
>
> "Vital signs?"
>
> "Normal."
>
> "Hemostat."
>
> “Suction”

The boot wearer looked into the surgical proceeding, his full military dress glittering in the bright lights of the operating room.

"How are vee doing, Herr Doktor?" he asked.

A white clad figure looked up briefly, the operating room lights glinting off his round eyeglasses, and then resumed his work. "Very well, my dear Colonel. We should have everything under control in a matter of seconds. The procedure was a bit tricky, but using some new microsurgical techniques we were able to isolate the chromosome chain responsible. I am basically sure that there has been no genetic damage, and the implants in the subject's brain should prove to be only a minor headache -- heh, heh, heh -- for the subject's recovery.

"Ah, excuse me. The coup de grâce." The doctor's fingers moved deftly with the scalpel, and the hemostat held aloft a tiny rosy-pink piece of tissue. A jar of formaldehyde was presented to him, and he plunked the tissue inside the fluid, motioning to the other physician to begin the process of closing up the patient.

"Just vhat vas that you placed in the jar, Herr Doktor?" asked the Colonel.

"Free will, my dear Colonel, free will."

I again leaned back in the squeaky chair, and with a hard swallow drained the last beer. I knew that old Crowface would be satisfied with this, and if he wasn't, tough. I doodled with my pen until I could hear Crowface in the room again. He again perched close to my ear to see what I had written.

He beamed, or at least it was a close to a beam that he could physically imitate. "Vell, Mr. Maxwell, vee are happy to see that you have decided to cooperate." He began reading my copy. I just stood there.

After a few moments he looked up at me with mild disgust, and dusted me away with his finger movements. "Oh, you are free to go, Mr. Maxwell." He returned to his reading. As I left the room he called after me, "See you next veek, Mr. Maxwell."

I lit the last of the cigarettes and tossed the crumpled package directly into the wastebasket. Damn, these publishers were all alike.

4. BUTTS

I reeled in total surprise at the sight of the softly rumpled cigarette pack sprawled in the ashtray in front of me in semi-seductive fashion, its soft, twisted shape catching my eye with more than just sight.

A luscious tanned butt peeked from a corner of the tousled pack, as if under sheets in an earth scented bed, a scent that teased and swirled around my nostrils, causing them to flare in a sexual snort.

With shaking hands I gently peeled back the red thermoplastic sheets to reveal the white creased thigh of the cigarette. I took it in my hands, gently caressing its body, running my lips softly across its spine, delicately cherishing that silent, gentle coughing of fast and sensual satisfaction. Between my fingers its backbone arched upward, passionately turning its soft filter tip towards me in open seduction. I shuddered.

No, I mustn't. I couldn't. I wouldn't. I had promised I would quit, that there would be no more bathroom temptations. No, I just couldn't...

Nude from the bottom down, the Slim Virginia slipped from my fingers and settled with a sigh unto the soft mattress of the ashtray. A smust of charcoal brushed against its thigh, accenting

with shadows of mascara to shake my tempted heart. I rolled my eyes upward and out in quiet pain and propositioned pleasure, and then glanced over to the old gold bed. Could this just be that lucky strike?

The white thigh of the butt again caught my attention, shining with a certain lust and luster in the dim lighting of the room, sending its body creases glowing away in all directions in passionate aura. What was I going to do? My stomach tightened into a knot as a small bead of sweat broke forth on my brow. My trembling hands had been joined by trembling knees. I was so hot with desire I could almost taste that hot butt moving slowly against my lips.

My breathing became shallow, tense, almost a pant. The knot in my stomach had extended from my throat in the north to my groin in the south, and it throbbed and stiffened in lascivious anticipation.

I just wanted to explode...

5: THE POET: ODE TO AUSTRALOPITHECUS

Long time languishing by the watering hole

With no poetry to soothe my aching soul.

Lions and gazelles pass me by.

None stop long enough to see me cry.

I sit and I sit and I ache and ache

Wanting for something to make me break

From this world; ain't nothing but work and pain

For Australopithecus this ain't no game.

Scurrying around looking for food,

While my mate tries to convert crude

Into gasoline, or something keen

That will help us break from this cycle mean.

Eating shit and berries ain't no fun

I'd rather be tanning in the sun.

Watching the lions and gazelles go by

Without them having to see me cry.

Maybe one day I will evolve

Into something more than a wingless dove

Maybe someday I will become

Something to watch the setting sun.

Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals

Ain’t seen nothing of it at all.

Eating crap is normal with all of us

When you are an Australopithecus.

They say we can't think, can't wield no tool

But I know better, ain't nobody's fool.

Making a fire is a start

And putting wheels on a cart.

Building houses and riding horses

Eating meals of several courses.

Curing wounds filled with pus.

Ain’t nothing for Australopithecus.

I'd read books but they ain't written yet.

Don't have a remote for my TV set.

I dream of space travel and maybe one day

I'll travel along the Milky Way.

But till then, I must adjust

Chipping flint like Australopithecus.

6. URBAN LEGEND REVISISTED

I am told that the following story is true -- hearsay, but true, told to the sister of a friend of a neighbor.

Apparently this woman was a retail clerk at one of those infamous all-night convenience stores on South Lamar. You know, those places that usually get held up in the wee hours.

Late, late one evening, or perhaps better, early, early one morning, the clerk busied herself at keeping busy in the dead of the night. Not a soul was awake: the streets were deserted and the town was asleep.

Suddenly enters a scruffy "street person" type: unshaven, dirty, clad in ragged garb from head to toe. He casually browses through the small store, cruising down the candy aisle, past the beer, towards the canned goods. He picks up a can of tomato soup, examines it closely, reading the label from cover to cover. Finally he poses it back on the shelf, returns to the candy aisle, picks up a bag of marshmallows, again examining the package closely and reading the label. He puts it back in its place, returns to the can of tomato soup, re-examines it, puts it down and returns to fondle the bag of marshmallows. This process continues for a good five or ten minutes.

In the meanwhile, our heroine is naturally becoming apprehensive, realizing that she is alone in the store with this disreputable looking character, and finally calls out to the man. "Sir, you're going to have to buy something or leave....We can't allow loitering here."

The alleged customer acknowledges her with a nod, goes over to the soup can, examines it one last time, deposits it back on the shelf, returns to the marshmallows, plays with them one final time, puts them back, returns to get the can of soup, and slowly trudges up to the counter, placing his cream of tomato on the formica before him.

Our clerk begins to ring up the purchase, only to notice that her customer has unzipped his fly and lain his semi-erect penis on the counter before him.

With a surprised gasp and a lightning reflex, the clerk has picked up the soup can and brought it down with a heavy thud on top of the unsuspecting tallywacker, and then immediately punches the alarm button to summon the police.

Austin's finest are there in a matter of seconds, to find the potential lover still writhing in agony on the tile floor. He is quickly handcuffed. Our clerk recounts her tale, and he is hustled off to the waiting red-and-blue lighted squad car.

"Boy," one of the officers is heard to remark as the man is led away, "You should have gotten the marshmallows."

THE FENCE

"Reilly, go to the Maintenance Job at Camp Pershing. See Sgt. Lopez -- Connolly's on vacation. And don't stop nowhere on the way....If it takes you longer than fourteen minutes to get there -- starting...NOW- you're fired."

I sighed, slipped the damned phone back into the dash, and dejectedly cranked the engine of the battered service truck into life. I was really getting sick and tired of the Maintenance Job; in fact, I was getting pretty sick and tired of this work altogether. And, thinking about it further, I sure was getting pretty damn sick and tired of Mr. Boss Man.

I knew that I could make the Maintenance Job in about six and a half minutes, thus screwing Mr. Boss Man out of a couple more minutes today, so I took my time in putting the pickup into gear, deciding instead to continue writing these few quick notes. My little slowdown was one of the few acts of defiance I could get away with these days. But one of these days I would eventually get back enough time to compensate me for the cuts I had received over the years.

The squat, boil-faced toad of a guard at the security desk at Camp Pershing watched me with disinterested disdain, breaking his cold blue-eyed gaze every few seconds to glance at his video monitors. I recognized him as a flunky from one of the Militia rallies. He did not say a single word as he slowly wrote me out the temporary security pass I would need to do my maintenance work, casually taking his time as if knowing I was on a strict deadline with Mr. Boss Man. Finally, with a bored thrust of his chin, he motioned the way down the hall towards Lopez's office.

Lopez was an asshole; a pure and simple, ignorant, arrogant, asshole. Of course, so was Connolly. In fact, all of the Border Guards were assholes, every last one of them. I think it was a prerequisite for the job.

"We get tired of calling you guys out here to fix this thing," Lopez told me brusquely with an unmistakable touch of animosity, as if it were my fault that he had problems. "Make sure you fix it this time." His bald head snapped extra emphasis to his last phrase by clicking a stringy brown spit into a Styrofoam coffee cup filled halfway with the same obnoxious substance. He pushed his fat frame past me roughly into the hallway and down the corridor towards a side exit, irritatingly rattling the keys on his gun belt like he was playing pocket pool. I followed him silently down the hall, my toolbox hoisted on my shoulder. After unlocking the door to the electrical closet, he deliberately stood in my way, forcing me to skirt around his beefy frame, and he spat on the tile floor, narrowly missing my leg. Without saying another word, he hoisted up his gun belt as if he had done a full day's hard labor and swaggered back towards his office.

It was the electric Fence again, and I involuntarily shuddered as I realized what I was going to face. A cold sweat spattered forth on my brow and my hands began trembling like a frustrated alcoholic as I flipped the circuit breaker from its tripped position to the off-lockout position. Still shaking, I placed a heavy-duty industrial lock on the breaker, closed the panel cover, and placed another heavy-duty lock on the cover, snapping it shut with quaking fingers. As an added precaution, I hooked a third padlock into position over the second. Like I said, these Border Guards were all assholes.

With my knees still trembling, I staggered back to the service truck, letting Mr. Boss Man know that I had arrived at my destination with a full minute and a half to spare. As I pulled the long-handled pruning hook from the headache rack of the truck, I sighed and shuddered again and began walking haltingly the length of the electric Fence towards the site of the short-circuit. I could feel the hairs on the nape of my neck bristle, knowing well that I was in the cross-hairs of at least four Border Guards.

Midway up the fifteen foot razor wire-topped chain link fence another charcoal-black stump hung crucified, fused onto the galvanized metal by the electrical potential of 4800 volts. This one had made it pretty far; not only had it made the 100 yard dash from the outer fence without being shot, but it had also scaled

half-way up the chain-links before the deadly pulsating current had severed its life-line to the physical world. Two twin plumes of greasy grayish-black smoke lifted lazily above what remained of its shoulders, dispersing into the soft southerly breeze of the Rio Grande Valley several feet above the top of the fence. A sickly-sweet smell of burnt flesh, like a cheap overcooked barbecue, whiffed around my nostrils, making me gag. I wrapped a blue bandana around my nose and mouth, desperado fashion, and choked back the bile that lay fallow at the base of my throat. Several small piles of black ash swirled around my feet like ghostly pigeons as I approached with the pruning hook. With a hefty upward swing I landed the point of the tool with a grisly thrush into the left shoulder of the stump. Several smaller pieces of charcoaled gristle scattered from the main branch and fell on both sides of the fence. At least part of this poor soul will have escaped to Mexico. I gave a half-hearted pull on the handle of the hook, and the gnarled black log broke from the steel mesh, landing with a dry thud at my feet. A dozen large bluish-black horseflies swirled away in annoyance, only to return momentarily later to resume their feast. The log would have fallen on top of me, but I had learned many years ago to get out of the way.

Thank God I wouldn't have to clean it up. The hapless clean-up crew would have that task, and I again said a silent prayer that none of them would stray into the Fence. I ducked quickly into the Men's Room before I re-energized the Fence and puked my guts out, retching and dry-heaving for several minutes long after my insides had been emptied. The lukewarm salty water of the Lower Rio Grande water table did little to rinse my mouth and cool my face, but it would have to do for the time being. I knew that Sgt. Lopez would have wanted me to turn the Fence back on before I threw up, but that was his problem. Let him report me to Mr. Boss Man, and there was little doubt in my mind that he would. I would most certainly get the ass-chewing later this afternoon.

Sure to form, it wasn't twenty minutes later that the damned phone in the dash of the truck buzzed again. I let it ring several times, even though I was sitting right there in the cab, driving around the back roads of the Valley in a daze. It was Mr. Boss Man. "Dammit, Reilly, ain't you got the common sense to take a shit on your own time? Sgt. Lopez said that the Fence was de-energized for fifteen minutes after you got there. This could cost me the Maintenance Contract, you asshole! The next time you pull a stunt like this you're fired, you understand?"

"Sure." This was the only word I dared hiss out. Giving Mr. Boss Man a sizeable piece of my mind at this time would only have placed me without a job in the depressed Texas economy, and I knew that he would do his damnedest to see to it that I didn't collect unemployment either.

"Now, listen up," Mr. Boss Man continued. "Go to the Camp McLaren cafeteria in Hidalgo. See Mrs. Hsu. Got another project on the Maintenance Job. And if you see Maldonado, tell him he's fired. I haven't heard from him all day and he won't answer his damned phone. You've got forty minutes to get there -- starting...NOW -- or you're fired."

The other end of the line went dead. Mr. Boss Man was not one for civilities. I sighed again and pulled onto Highway 281 towards Hidalgo, taking a hefty swig from the sun-warmed bottle of Maalox that lay on the console. I was already halfway to my destination, unbeknownst to Mr. Boss Man, well clear of the McAllen lunch hour traffic, and ready to screw him out of another half-hour for the day. I would have a few minutes to grab a bite to eat and continue these random notes in my journal, a journal that was about my only reference point of sanity in this day and age.

Yeah, one of these days Mr. Boss Man and I were going to have a showdown. I couldn't say when or where, but there would be some serious payback in the works. Sometimes I wondered if he would actually make real his threats and fire me. It would be the stupidest thing he could do. But then, Mr. Boss Man wasn't the brightest star in the sky. I was the best electrician he had for his taxi-cab electric service -- no brag, just fact. I knew how every

little job he had had been piped, wired, and designed---I had done them all. But then I knew that there were a lot of other hungry people out there willing to grab my job for half the amount of pay, and I wondered if I probably had a too exaggerated sense of my own self-importance. And the painful reality of getting fired was not a pleasant prospect; not only would I be unable to collect unemployment, but after the drug testing, security checks, and psychological evaluations, it would be a full year before my new work license would be re-issued by the Republic of Texas. The opportunities for starvation were fairly concrete. And the alternative of the Work Camps was not appealing at all. With my weak heart, they would most certainly work me to death.

And then there was Mexico.

I looked up and all I could see in the rear-view mirror was a camo-colored radiator grille and headlights flashing on and off in the high beam. I pulled over to the shoulder of 281 to allow a convoy of armored personnel carriers zoom past me in break-neck fashion. The first of the caravan was almost touching the ten-foot ladder that lay strapped to the rack of the truck. The pimple-faced young Border Guard in the passenger side of the first vehicle shot me the finger with a sardonic laugh on his face as they zipped by. I ignored it. It was best to. There was no telling where they might be heading. It might be another demonstration or it simply could be something as innocuous as a shift change.

I had a cold, creeping fear about the electrical problem at the Camp McLaren cafeteria as I received my security pass from the blonde corporal at the camp's checkpoint gate. Her hard sheet-metal gray eyes dissolved any sort of beauty she may have otherwise had. As I rounded the base towards the loading dock of the cafeteria, I prayed silently that it would not be the trash compactor again. Sweet Baby Jesus, how I hated this job.

As I backed the truck up to the loading dock, Mrs. Hsu and Mrs. Novak were waiting for me, impatiently pacing the warm concrete slab. After letting Mr. Boss Man know that I had arrived, several minutes ahead of schedule, I got out slowly and continuously ambled up to them, nodding my greetings silently. Mrs. Hsu smiled at me grimly. She most certainly had been a raving beauty in her younger days, with eyes that held a spark of an unknown quality. Now with breasts the size of Denmark and hips to shake the Caucasus, she looked overworked and overwrought, tired and defeated. I always did my best to ad lib a joke when I was there; it was worth it just to get her eyes to shine. Mrs. Novak, tall, thin, and as frail and fragile as a light bulb, writhed her hands together helplessly as her eyes darted everywhere except to make contact with mine. Neither one of them could have been more than 45, but long years of hard work and a certain hopeless haplessness had aged them well beyond their years.

"It's the trash compactor again, Sean. I shut it off as soon as I heard the screams," Mrs. Hsu said quietly with her earnestly exotic accent. "The Border Guards made a spot check." She waddled over to the loading dock roll-up door and pointed towards the large dumpster-sized trash compactor.

I nodded at her, trying to smile reassuringly. There would be no joke for Mrs. Hsu today as I realized that my silent prayer had been in vain. Mrs. Novak scurried near us. "Those people have no souls. They simply have no souls," she said under her breath, wringing her bony fingers together, while her flitting eyes set in a pale, skinny white skull were glancing about like a caged animal at a test lab.

Mrs. Hsu hissed at her in a "shut-up" fashion, but her eyes showed that she agreed wholeheartedly with Mrs. Novak.

I nodded knowingly to both of them, swallowing down another glob of gall bladder that had eeked up from my guts. If I had a choice, I really preferred stump work. The Border Guards had already left, not even waiting to see the product of their murderous labors. Mrs. Novak mentioned that they had stolen several of her pies on the way out.

Not too many make it out through the trash compactor, but it's still possible to get to Mexico from there. My uncle had done it. Most of them survive, although some probably wish that they hadn't. The ones captured by the Border Guards, if they recovered from their injuries, either found themselves at the maximum security unit at Marion Prison or among the Desaparecidos.

Nonetheless, I wished that this one was still alive. I wished they all were still alive. I punched the "open" button on the control console, and with slow motor action the compactor slowly hummed open.

"I pushed the 'stop' button as soon as I heard the screams," Mrs. Hsu said again, looking deeply at me with black eyes that told the whole story of her anguish. I couldn't blame her. She was in the same trap that I was. I nodded to her again with the best understanding I could muster.

The splash of bright red all over the inside of the dumpster grimly told me that my hopes were again in vain. The poor soul had apparently waited until the last second to scream, and then had shrieked in pain, not in some desperate plea to be released. This one had split like a watermelon from the throat down.

I looked at the face. Usually I don't, but this time I did. It was my friend Ernesto Maldonado from work. The quarter pounder with cheese came up.

I don't remember if I did the rest of my work there, but then I really don't care if I did or not. I do remember the phone buzzing several times, but the last thing I wanted to do was talk to Mr. Boss Man. I would have killed him over the phone.

I do remember driving to my private *sanctus sanctorum*, an abandoned farm house between San Juan and Alamo. The Border Patrol seldom molested the spot; nor did the Anti-Terrorist Police. I just needed to think and write some thoughts down; I just needed to be by myself.

Ernesto and I had not been that close, as far as friends go. Friendship was a valuable and rare commodity in this age when children would turn in parents—or parents turn in children-- for any statement against the Republic of Texas. But Ernesto had definitely been Good People. We both had at least trusted each other, knowing that neither would snitch on the other, and we both had been equally vehement in our condemnation of Mr. Boss Man. We occasionally would drink cheap beer in this very spot after work, devising fantastic schemes against Mr. Boss Man free from the ever-present ears of hostile forces.

We had conversed in a lively style that would keep both of us thinking for days afterward. Both of us had done our tour of duty in Columbia, although in different units; it wasn't like we were terrorists or anything. We had also talked about the Fence, wondering why it was even there. I know that the “official” reason was to keep the drug traffic out of Texas, and Dad had mentioned that it was also probably built to keep out "illegal" immigrant labor that the Republic of Texas couldn't tax, but Ernesto had claimed that if they had really wanted to keep labor out they wouldn't have enacted the Free Trade Agreement with Mexico. He did have a point there. There were always dozens of Mexicans coming over the bridge at Camp Pershing during the evening shut-down of the electric Fence, but I can't ever recall seeing a single person ever crossing back over to the Mexican side. Ernesto's theory was that it was all a plot of the corporations to fill the country full of cheap labor and thus destroy any chance of organizing unions. Dad had mentioned that there had once been an electrician's union, but that it had disappeared many years ago. I remember trying to break the tension of our discussion that evening by saying with a jokish flair that any good farmer would lock his chickens up at night, but Ernesto had waved me off with an irritated sluff of his hand.

"Sean, Sean, Sean, can't you see? They're trying to kill our spirit!!" he had cried exasperatedly.

I remember staring at him blankly, out of comprehension or incomprehension, I'm not sure. I knew that he was a member of the outlawed Socialist Party, and probably a little more politically paranoid than I was, and I also knew I was not in the least bit political, not even bothering to vote. It didn't change anything anyway. I remember somebody saying that it voting could change the System, it would be illegal. And I felt as free as I ever did. I could sit on my front porch and drink all the beer I wanted, even being able to drunkenly heckle the Neighborhood Watch when they would come around with their picket signs.

Sure there had been some changes. I didn't think much about the Flag Burning Amendment, but I must admit that I thought it strange when it became a felony offense to paste a postage stamp of the flag upside down on a letter. And I had even praised the nightly curfews imposed by the Republic of Texas, even though I must candidly admit I had slipped home through the back roads once or twice after hours. At least there would be some control on the gang problem, and maybe I wouldn't get burglarized again.

Ernesto and I had also talked about the possibilities of escaping into Mexico; him, more out of a conviction that it could be done; me, more with caution of the risks. I had no idea that he was going to try it. I guess that our trust of each other had not extended that far. But he had attempted it, and now he was dead, smashed as inconsequentially as a June bug on the windshield of the truck. I felt a certain loss, a certain emptiness, and a certain frustration that I could not explain.

How many stumps had I peeled from the Fence? How many crushed watermelons had I scraped from the trash compactor? How many bullet-ridden bodies had I seen on that hard hundred yard stretch between the outer fence and the electric Fence? I could not even say. One would think that something like that would be forever etched in one's mind. But I had lost count.

I thought back to the time Ernesto and I had worked at Camp Pershing installing several new floodlights apparently shot out by vandals. As we had worked, a gang of youths, Lord, there must have been seven of them, had driven a battered and ancient 1994 Oldsmobile right through both the outer perimeter fence and the electric Fence. The car was a work of art, with small low-rider tires in front and large mag trims and tires in the rear. It has been immaculately painted with bright-colored, pain-stakingly applied graffiti, displaying at several locations the slogan "Tierra y Libertad" and the Virgen de Guadalupe. The spray painting had been done very artistically, not the splash-on-in-a-hurry style that one usually sees in downtown Brownsville or McAllen. They had taken their time on this project. The name of the gang had also been carefully emblazoned on the vehicle: "Ghost Dancers." I wish that I had a photograph of it.

In spite of all the gunfire, they had made it right through the Fence in a fireworks display of blue sparks. Even after they had been shot out, the large tires in the rear of the Oldsmobile had given them enough traction to climb over the downed barrier and race for the Rio Grande. Sliding to a stop on the banks of the river, they all bailed out of the vehicle and attempted to make a desperate swim for freedom, all clad in rubber wetsuits to insulate them from the perils of the Fence, only to be swathed in automatic weapon fire from the Border Guards. They had fallen in their tracks, three of them clumped together in a gruesome *menage à trois*, two others nearby, and a third to float downstream in the sluggish current of the Rio Bravo. And one of them had made it to the Other Side. The whole affair now seemed like a long lost dream, surfacing in my consciousness in the wake of Ernesto's attempted escape. Indeed, seditious thoughts also began bubbling to a froth in my mind.

Another long lost memory burped forth from my unconscious, one lone suppressed by years of conscious repression. How I could laugh at the righteous picket lines of the Neighborhood Watch now! But, yeah, the Neighborhood Watch. The *second* most angry I had ever seen Dad was the evening the Watch had busted into the trailer and held us all at the business end of shotguns while they proceeded to ransack everything in sight. They then commenced to building a bonfire in the front yard, burning anything and everything they didn't like: books,

furniture, Grandpa's old cassette tapes of Gil Scott Heron and The Grateful Dead, my schoolwork. One of them had sadistically roasted my little sister's Mickey Mouse doll on the end of one of Dad's broken fishing rods, laughing hysterically like a crazed Hephaestus singed in the brain by nuclear fire. I was twelve and too stupid to know better, and had lashed out with a baseball bat on the nearest of the bunch. I spent two days and nights in the county jail with an unhealthy set of bruises for that. The *angriest* I had ever seen the Old Man was when the Sheriff and the Commissioner's Court turned their backs on the whole thing; he punched many a hole in the sheetrock walls of the trailer that night. Dad fought it in the courts only to have the case dismissed summarily without opinion. The appeal went the same way. Then the money ran out, and the Old Man gave up on it, only to be laid off several weeks later.

Things just were not the same after that. His mood changed; he spent less and less time with the kids and got into more and more loud arguments with Mom. He had to go on the road for work, at less pay, and Mom took on more hours at her job. I started taking care of little Janie between school and my own job at the supermarket. When the Old Man did return home, sometimes after months on end, things would return, for a few days at least, to a happy near-normal, even if it did take him an extra six-pack to get there. He would start singing around the house, wooing Mom with old love songs and performing silly acts for us kids. One winter evening, with all of us wearing an extra flannel shirt and the fireplace trying to take the chill out of the air, Dad suddenly blurted out,

"You can check out any time you like
But you can never leave...."

with a haunting harmony so intense that I could almost feel a slow electric charge race through the air. He then laughed gustily and looked at me straight in the eyes, his own eyes bright with an almost frightening quality, and said softly to me, "Son, don't ever check in to Hotel California." I was never sure what he meant by that.

Several weeks later he was dead, killed in the meltdown at Luke's Nukes, the Lucasville Nuclear power plant. I was seventeen, and soon went to work as an electrician's apprentice. Mom died of an overdose four months later. I had to take care of Janie, but I think she managed on her own for the most part.

One thing stood clear after this flashback. I had nothing left to lose. I was going to Mexico.

I started losing any old fear that had been building up over the years. I was going to leave and not worry about it. Mr. Boss Man was more scared than I was and my leaving would settle an old score; it would be interesting to see what Mr. Boss Man would do without me to get his ass out of a jam with the Republic of Texas every time a little problem came up, but I would not wait around to see it. I was going to Mexico.

I was so engrossed in my note-writing that I barely heard the squad car pull in behind me. I had just a split seconds to hide my journal and retrieve my work clipboard.

"What the hell you doing here, boy?" the fat cop bellowed as he emerged from the black armored squad car, his hand unsnapping his holster. He must have been twenty years younger than me and yet still called me a boy. His partner with the mirror sunglasses had stepped out of the other side with the pump shotgun casually pointing through the passenger side window, finger itching for a cheap thrill.

I had to think fast and stay calm, and my aforementioned conquest of fear most certainly aided me in keeping a cool attitude. I got out of the truck, slowly with my hands in the air and called back to them in pure good-ole-boy fashion, grin on my face, "Now y'all don't shoot or anything, I'm just sitting here getting my work ready for this house."

Nonetheless, I was soon spread-eagled against the side of the truck by the fat cop as his tobacco-dipping partner with the mirror sunglasses stood by. After they were convinced I posed no threat to the integrity or security of the Republic of Texas, we casually

talked about football and deer-hunting. Years of experience had made me the perfect suck-ass; I convinced them I was out to do electric work on the abandoned old house, even offering my damned phone for them to call Mr. Boss Man. I must have done an efficient job of it also, for they neither called in my truck license plate, (which would not have been surprising to discover that Mr. Boss Man had reported stolen by this time); nor did they search the truck, in which case they would have found the books I had stashed in the saddle box. But those two would not have known shit from wild honey, ignorant products of a cheap parole from the Republic of Texas. For them, the psychological trip of raw power was enough to keep them happy.

The phone buzzed again several minutes after they left, and I let it ring. I had no use for Mr. Boss Man now. I was going to Mexico.

And I really had nothing to lose. My wife Meg had died several years previous from an unknown cancer, and my daughter Tracy was old enough to take care of herself; indeed, she had been from an early age. My son was a Desaparecido in Austin; the only information I had was that he had been arrested at the Republic of Texas-sponsored Eeyore's Birthday Party celebration for handing out an underground publication. I had no idea of where he was; if even he was still alive. And all the material possessions I had I could do without.

I began formulating my plan. Camp Pershing I knew best; I would exit the State of Texas from there. I had a set of bolt cutters in the truck with which I would cut through the Fence after I de-energized it. But I would have to wait until dark. I had all the supplies I would need for my plot on the service truck, but I still needed to make the necessary wiring changes before my nocturnal departure.

The phone continued to buzz at regular intervals, once for at least a dozen times. I finally tossed it out the window.

Finally, with determination set, I launched the old Ford into gear and headed towards Camp Pershing. I made one stop along the way and picked up a twelve-pack of cheap beer and a bag of ice. I would ensure that my courage be bolstered one way or another; there was no backing out now.

Music can make you feel good; I've discovered that over the years. Good music is good music, no matter what the Lower Rio Grande Valley Arts Council had to say about it. I still have some of Grandpa's old records stashed away; it would be a shame to let those go, but I had my mind set. The old Sophie Tucker, Fats Waller, and Billy Butterfield albums would most certainly be a valuable trading commodity. And just to hear that good music would make my mind escape from all day to day problems. I could never see how the State of Texas could make possession of certain music a criminal offense, but at any Post Office the weekly listings of outlawed music and books, pages upon pages, continued to appear.

Getting into the substation at Progreso was easy enough. Private Culpepper knew me from sight and just waved me through, like he was directing traffic. He was probably one of the better Border Guards, often calling out hello to me as I made my service calls. Probably one of the few who wasn't an asshole. I waved to him and descended the manhole. Progreso was also the nerve center for telephone and computer communications in this part of the Republic of Texas. I accomplished my subterfuge wiring without incident.

I also had no trouble getting back into Camp Pershing. The boil-faced guard at the security desk had gone home, as had Sgt. Lopez. The civilian clerk at the desk handed me my pass without inquiry, and he even handed me the key to the electric room without question.

It was a good thing that I had wired this entire building myself. Well, not exactly all by myself. I was the general foreman on the job. But I knew every wire, every contactor, every relay, every switch, every plug, like it was the wiring in my own home. I was thankful that I had had the control crew pull spare wires into

every pipe; they most certainly would serve a purpose now. I had always prided myself in being an efficient craftsman.

I finally finished the last of my treasonous wiring, double-checking every connection in my mind. There would be no second chances. I had everything ready to go, only having to wait for the cover of darkness. I sat down on my toolbox, reached inside the Igloo to grab a beer, and drained it appreciatively as I awaited the witching hour.

As I sat on the corner of my toolbox and reflected in this journal on the outrageous action I was about to take -- the point of no return -- I heard a loud metallic thunk and a very definite gasp coming from one of the switch gears. A pang of fright shot through my chest, giving my tired ticker a shock that it was not prepared for. My heart then shot to my throat as I realized that my whole scheme could be annihilated at any second by the appearance of the Border Guards -- or anyone else for that matter. It was best to prepare a bluff.

"Who's there? Come out right now or I'm gonna call the Border Guards!"

Another muffled gasp and thunk sounded over the hum of all the power equipment and I quickly triangulated the source of the noise. "You better come on out right now."

A muffled female sob came forth from the bottom panel of the 480 volt switch gear. "Don't shoot, don't shoot, please don't shoot!" The muffledness of the voice gave way to a clearer tone as the panel fell from the large high voltage gear and a mass of brown wavy hair fell out, followed by the form of a teenaged girl.

Clad in dark blue tee-shirt and Levis, the girl emerged from her crouched hiding place and stood to face me in total apprehension. She was sopping wet with sweat from the inductive heat of the high voltage transformer. It was a wonder that she wasn't fried like an egg, as close as she had been to the live 12,500 volts.

Apparently this kid, who was maybe a year or two older than my daughter Tracy, worked in Housekeeping at the Administration Building, which explained how she had obtained the key to the electrical room. She had heard me enter and had the time to hide herself in the switch gear as I went about my work. Full of either ignorance or bravado, I'm not sure, she candidly admitted that she was going to Mexico, staring me defiantly in the eye the only time her glance met my studied gaze. But defiant or not, she was scared shitless. I reassured her with the best fatherly manner I could that I was not going to turn her in.

I think she realized that I was not where I should be either after she saw the beer cans. "You're breaking out too, ain't ya?" she asked bluntly after a short silence, her hazel eyes staring me in the eye. I just nodded quietly and tried to plan my next move, no, rather, *our* next move. Her presence here made things all the more complicated, as evidenced by the beads of sweat on my forehead and the tightening clamp across my chest.

She began chattering softly yet excitedly about her plan for getting out. Several times I harshly told her to "sssshhhh," as her voice would slowly rise with her excitement. It was hard to think with her incessant chattering, and I didn't want to appear too gruff, but I was getting pissed off. But I could tell that she was more than relieved to have found an ally and protector, although there is not much protection I could have offered her against automatic weapon fire.

"I've even got the money to pay a coyote," she insisted.

"Honey, unless you have more than $5000 forget it. The coyotes will get that much from the bounty they bring in on you. You better have $5001."

She deflated a little, but then spoke again defiantly, if somberly. "I've also got this." She lifted her tee-shirt to reveal the pearl-handled butt of an old rusty hand gun tucked into the front of her jeans, relic of a time when disputes were settled by .38 caliber slugs. There is little doubt in my mind that she would have attempted to use it on me if I had tried to thwart her plans.

I shrugged and threw up my hands in a half-exasperated manner. I guess there was some sort of understanding established between us at that point. I still needed to work all of this into a working plan of action. Looking for some more fast courage, I swallowed the better part of a remaining beer.

"I also know that first border guard," she mentioned casually and quietly, throwing in her final Ace-In-The-Hole attempt for me to take her seriously.

The ace won the pot.

Under the cover of late twilight, while she was charming her erstwhile friend, which turned out to be a much simpler task than I expected, as I understood that she had been resisting his aggressive advances for some time now, I sneaked up behind him and grasped him firmly around the nose and mouth. His eyes bulged madly and with sheer terror as his arms flayed wildly in an attempt to break my grasp. He did manage to scratch my cheek with a dirty, greasy, uncut fingernail before his back jaw began to float in my hand. Thank goodness that years of lifting three-inch rigid pipe had paid off for something. He would be conscious after several minutes, with a whiplash to remember me by, but by that time I would be long gone south of the border. I securely bound his hands and legs together with long pieces of No. 12 solid electrical wire and strapped his mouth shut with duct tape.

The girl and I then ran in a crouched position towards a spot hidden by shadow along the Fence. The hum of pulsing electric current followed us as we hurried to our point of departure, me dragging two rolls of four-conductor Beldon cable wire in one hand which unreeled as we ran, and a pair of bolt cutters in the other.

They would shut off the power to the Fence soon, but in the meantime we waited anxiously. Sweat dripped steadily from my face and I was almost worried that the moisture would short-out the switches I finished wiring together. My heart was beating furiously, from the run or the excitement I'm not sure but I sure prayed that it would not give up at the critical moment. The girl was also frightened, as evidenced by the constant darting of her brown eyes and her trembling lips, but she was holding up her end of the escape and did not say a word.

Finally they cut the power to the Fence, and the gate at the International Bridge rolled open with a rattle and a clank. The evening's catch of fortune hunters trekked northward past the watchful eyes of the Border Guards as I quickly began snipping the chain links of the Fence with the bolt cutters as fast as I could. Finally I peeled back a section large enough for a body to crawl through.

"Alright, now go. Run as fast as you can and then try to dive in the water without too much noise. Don't waste any time." She nodded with determined anticipation, brown hair falling into her eyes with each nod. "You're on your own. Don't wait for me. Just keep on going. If you get to Zacatecas look up my uncle, Cleveland Maxwell. His email is cmaxwell@moment.net. He'll be able to help you get settled. Avoid people. Just keep going to Zacatecas." She nodded again. "Now go."

I ushered her through the rip in the bowels of the Fence, pushing her butt bluntly. Her tee-shirt snagged on the torn chain links as the Fence tried desperately to swallow another victim. I could dimly see her shadow run swiftly and quietly into the darkness, disappearing with a silent splash into the murky waters of the Rio Grande. My heart was thumping like a snare-drum solo.

Time was growing extremely short. The group of trekkers on the bridge had thinned; soon the metal motorized gate would be clinking shut and the Fence would be energized again. I needed to do my dirty duty now.

I flipped a switch, and the floodlights around the bridge went dark. Shouting and confusion began to fill the pale starlight, and the wail of the sirens slowly began to fill the air with growing crescendo, only to be cut short by the throw of another switch. The wail descended in pitch as slowly as it had risen in pitch.

Shouting was soon supplemented by shooting. Several of the new arrivals from Mexico lay scattered on the ground ducking for cover as others were herded together by the confused Border Guards.

Another flip of the switch and a loud explosion erupted from inside the administration building. A fourth flip, which I administered with a flair, would render Mr. Boss Man's telephone and computer lines, as well as those of most of the county, forever useless. Let him try and explain that to the Republic of Texas.

Smoke and flames were coming out of the admin building.

I had to go....With all the excitement, the Fence would be turned on in any second. With a dull pain in my chest, I pushed myself through the gnarled galvanized steel webbing....

"Olivarez, go to the Maintenance Job at Camp Pershing. See Sgt. Lopez -- Connally's on vacation. I don't know where the hell Reilly is, but if you see him, tell him he's fired. You'll need a stump hook. And use the c.b. I can't get the damned phones to work around here. I can't get anything to work around here. And don't stop anywhere along the way. If it takes you longer than ten minutes to get there, starting...now, you're fired."

Man, I don't know how she does that. There is that same knock on my motel room door, this time at 10:15 at night. How did she even know I was here?

I got up from the desk and the laptop to unlock the chain and open the door.

"Hello Amora. I did not know you were even going to be in Eastland, Texas."

She let herself in, gracefully as always, not even waiting for my invitation, nodded to me graciously and spoke softly and sweetly.

"Hello Bishop Maxwell. I was here surveilling some local efforts at cooperative engineering to determine our next project move and I decided that I would pay you a visit."

Her assertive candor always amazed me. There was no apology for her unannounced visit and her make-herself-at-home demeanor, but I guess that I really didn't mind. If I were a younger man I would most certainly be tempted to pursue a romantic relationship, but I really lacked the self-confidence to do that.

"Please come in, Amora", I answered, even though she had already ploofed herself down on the motel room couch. "I am guessing that you received my last email with the necessary moves to counter the current situation in El Salvador?"

She waved her hand dismissively. "Yes, yes, of course. Have you some of that excellent drinking material and perhaps some additional jokes about that Aggie clan?"

She looked tired.

“I have about four bottles of Guinness and about half a bottle of tequila. Will that be OK?”

She again waved a dismissive hand, perhaps a little less emphatically this time. “Yes, that will be fine. Thank you Bishop Cleve.”

The beers were still a little cool, and I uncapped two of them. I poured a half glass of the cheap tequila into one of the motel’s plastic cups and added a couple of ice cubes to it.

She slammed back the entire contents of the glass in one massive tequila shot in and drained half the bottle of beer in several loud guzzles, then silently extended the glass out for a refill.

“Uh, did you have a rough day, Amora?” I ventured as I poured some more cactus juice into the plastic cup.

“Perhaps,” she replied. “It seems that we are losing ground amongst the factored population. I am not sure exactly on how to proceed.” She tossed back the second glass of tequila with as equal gusto as the first shot, and drained the last of her beer bottle. She again silently extend the empty cup. “What is the latest on your research? Have you finished your postings?” She had for the moment reverted back to her role as supervisor.

“Using the information you provided, I am slowly closing in on the basics of the dark matter correlations to the unconscious. I will be ready to transmit some of the details shortly, and I have already arranged to transmit the archetypical algorithm to a software engineer.”

She gently wiggled the empty cup in front of her. I got the hint, and poured another large shot into the glass.

The third tequila shot disappeared as quickly as the first two, along with half a bottle of another Guinness Stout, which she had taken the liberty to uncap herself. She then burped loudly in a rather undignified way.

I am certainly not a scientist or anything, but I do know that when a young woman comes to one’s abode in the late evening and begins chugging tequila shots, one can guess the ultimate outcome.

I attempted to deflect the situation with some more work stuff. “I should have the all the needed information for your extended time-space continuum travels within a week or so. Once the synchronistic power and the musical frequencies are integrated through the temporal crystals, the results are spectacular.”

“Thank you Cleve”, she said sweetly, starting to slur her words. She finished the second beer, set the bottle down, and continued. “Thank you for your continuing hoshpitality. I did not know where to turn. I needed a playsh to retreat for a moment from the pressures of this endeavor and to be with someone I care for…”

Her voice trailed off and she leaned towards me with closed eyes and slightly parted lips.

As much as I had always fantasized about this moment, I realized that something was just not right, even as I strained against my cargo shorts. I held her gently at bay as she had totally melted in my arms. “Hey, Amora…This is moving a little fast. Can we slow down a bit?”

“Why, yesh, Bishop Maxwell…I apologize for….”

Her head fell forward and she puked in my lap.

THE ALGORYTHM

"Hey, honey, look at this," I exclaimed to Debbie as I reached behind the dusty boxes of old unread Reader's Digest Condensed Books to retrieve an equally dusty small beige suitcase with busted hasp and cracked handle. "It's some sort of musical instrument."

Debbie put down the rough cut glass unicorn she was admiring, brushed back a lock of silky dark charcoal hair and strolled casually over to my side.

"What is it?” she enquired, as she pushed up against me, wrapping an arm around my waist and propping her chin on my shoulder.

"I'm not sure." With a strong breath I blew off as much of the flea market's fine dusty powder that I could and released the remaining uncrippled hasp with a deft flick of my thumb. Inside the mysterious case, its brass exterior tarnished with age, rested a musty saxophone, horn full of cobwebs and felt pads slipping off of their respective holders.

I grasped it and immediately sought to find the proper finger positions for the instrument. I had played saxophone in my high school band, but had quit as peer pressure jibes of being a band nerd had interfered with my dating desires and after two years of frustration at the band coach's insistence at practicing marching songs for football games had interfered with my own desires for Charlie Parker impressions. But I had always loved the voice-like melodies I could create in the tube of brass, felt, and springs, and really always wanted to play the instrument again.

I assembled the mouthpiece and the neck, even dabbing the cork with what remained of the cork grease, hooked on the strap, and had the entire instrument draped around my neck before I realized that I was not about to blow into the greenish-looking reed that lay fallow in the mouthpiece. Nonetheless, I decided then and there to buy it. I packed it back gently into its burnished yellow case and told Debbie categorically, "I'm going to get it."

Debbie shrugged and didn't argue. After seven years of marriage and ten years of collective estate-sales and flea-markets, she knew not to argue. Besides, I knew that it would give her the perfect excuse to purchase that crystal unicorn.

I was even ready to pack up our wares and go home---the sax had had the impact on me. I assembled my selected junk, motioning with an impatient nod to Debbie that I was ready to go, even though she was still browsing absent-mindedly among the dusty shelves of this Hobart, Indiana estate sale.

No problem. I ambled over to the middle-aged woman at the desk set up by the front door, trying to balance the saxophone case, a handful of obscure electrical parts, and several old books, and quite unceremoniously the entire collection fell with a clatter on her card table, giving the poor woman a little start and breaking her from the dog-eared Cleveland Maxwell paperback she was reading.

“How are you today," I asked pleasantly. "You have some real nice stuff here"

"Why, thank you." She looked up at me with thick horn-rimmed spectacles with the pointed tips that used to be popular in the Fifties. The thickness of the lenses of her glasses made her eyes appear to be twice her normal size, giving her the eerie appearance of a strange insect of some sort, or perhaps some sort of space alien. She immediately began adding up the material I had dumped in front of her.

“This is all part of my great-uncle’s estate. It’s time to clear out some of his old stuff,’ she offered.

"Oh, and whatever ever my wife has also," I added quickly, trying to get my weird impressions of the insect woman out of my mind before I would blurt out something stupid. "How much are you asking for the saxophone?" Not that it would make a difference. I had already decided to get it, even if I had to run up the credit card.

"Twenty dollars," she replied impassively

I was almost incredulous, but I had to stifle my enthusiasm for the bargain I was about to get. I nodded calmly, pretending like it was a little high but that I was willing to pay it. I couldn't believe that she only wanted twenty bucks for it. Maybe the thing was hot....

"It's a magic sax, you know," she continued, interrupting my thoughts. "It’s an l929 Martin Low-Pitch Alto Sax. My great-uncle, Cleveland Maxwell, played it in one of those big band orchestras, Count Basse's maybe, and it also supposedly has magic powers."

Right, lady, I wanted to say, but mentally bit my tongue. I think that the book she was reading was beginning to affect her brain.

"Seriously, sir," she continued, her magnified brown bug eyes blinking with a flicker of what I can only guess to be knowledge of what I was thinking, and also with a certain spark of earnest that I cannot explain. "My great-uncle didn’t know a chord from a wind chime. After he got the sax from the person in Count Basse's orchestra, he was playing it like a professional."

"Really?” I was almost interested. "What sort of magical powers does it has?"

"You'll find out," she nodded knowingly, as Debbie placed a handful of merchandise on the table next to me, and the insect lady started her calculations. "But I can say that the tonal effects will be most remarkable. That will be $40 total. Say $35.00. And thank you for buying the sax, sir. I know it has found a good home”. She beamed through the bug-eye glasses.

"Thank *you*," I answered absent mindedly. I didn’t need any help with magical powers for the saxophone---I could play it by my own right. But in retrospect, it sure appeared that the old gal was really happy to have unloaded the instrument.

Really didn't think much about any of the afternoon’s incidents. Debbie and I pigged out at the Shakey's All-You-Can-Eat Buffet

in Portage and started the drive home to Peoria, taking Highway 6 through Gary and points east. A late November snow had coated the ground and the wind had a certain chill to it, a chill which I know was seasonal, but it still seemed to be a little bit of an eerie effect, especially considering how warm it had been when we had gone into the restaurant. The sky was coated with a layer of strange purple and orange light with the evening sunset. Traffic was light.

At the corner of Georgia and Route 6 in Gary I was surprised to see a guy in shorts and T-shirt playing the saxophone in the middle of the street and snow. I rolled down the window to hear what his sax had to say while I was at the red light. Sounded pretty good, actually. But like I say, I was surprised---first of all to see a dude playing barefoot in shorts and T-shirt in the late autumn snow, but also at the additional coincidence of the saxophone.

Debbie flicked on the radio and started thumbing thru the FM stations. On 103.7 the strains of the familiar instrument filtered through the speakers in the car. Again the saxophone symbolism.

"That's Thelonious Monk," I remarked in surprise.

"Yeah," Debbie answered casually, pulling up closer to me. "Sounds really good."

I reached over with my right arm and pulled her closer. The music seemed to meld us together even closer. I could almost feel her inner yearnings. My yearnings were beginning to stir also.

The music almost made me forget my driving, but not to the point to where I realized that we were practically the only ones on Interstate 84. A lone eighteen wheeler lumbered past us in the opposite direction, striving to make a deadline. The snow had thickened to the size of corn-flake sized blotches which somehow did not seem to land on the windshield but yet filled the silent ditches on the side of the road. A pale yellow glow seemed to fill the inside of the cab as we strolled automotively down the highway. It was quite magical it its own right.

The intensity of the snow kept intensifying. Increasingly and inadvertently I would find myself slipping across the black top. I slowed my speed to match conditions.

"Let's get a motel room...I don't want to risk making Peoria tonight," I stated to Debbie.

"OK", Debbie replied without argument. The music was still excellent, but I didn't want to take a chance. Besides, my inner stirrings were still activating. Debbie's little kisses and nibblings didn't help matters any. At the Joliet exit we pulled off the Interstate and found the nearby Motel 6.

I made it a point to pick up a couple of four-packs of wine-coolers from a nearby convenience store. We didn't have any overnight clothes, but it wasn't like we had sweated all day either.

As we pulled into the motel parking lot I could still hear the excellent music coming forth from the car radio. It was Gato Barbieri now. More saxes. Strange synchronicities.

I would almost have sworn that the motel clerk was a twin sister to the lady at the flea-market in Hobart. The same looks, expression, and almost identical pointed horn rimmed glasses that gave her that bug look almost made me say something, but I held my tongue. But her parting comment almost unglued me:

"You better take the saxophone inside. It's going to be cold tonight."

"Thanks". I wasn't about to inquire, but that was totally weird. How did the bug-eyed lady know that?

I mentioned it to Debbie as we drove around the corner of the motel; to our room. "Wow. That's really weird," she replied.

But as we unpacked, it was really strange to look in the trunk of the Chevy and see the twenty dollar saxophone out of its case, mouthpiece and neck assembled. What really was totally weird was when I touched the reed and it was still damp. I was stunned.

I was silent as we unpacked into the spartan accommodations the Motel Sax. I mean Six. Debbie was beginning to relax and had propped herself on the bed with the television remote. Damned if it wasn't a sax player. I took the remote from her and switched channels with an almost angry flick of my wrist only to discover the President playing the saxophone at some obscure function or fundraiser. I turned the television off quickly. Debbie looked at me questioningly. "What's wrong, honey?"

I didn't know where to begin. "Baby, did we stop anywhere between the flea market and here?"

"Only Shakey's. What's wrong, honey?" she repeated

I recounted to her what the motel clerk had said and what I had discovered in the truck of the car.

"Honey, you're imagining things."

"No, I'm not," I snapped back, almost angrily." Unless someone got into the trunk while we were in Shakey's and played the saxophone while we were eating, then I can't explain this. You didn't play the sax while I was in the motel office, did you?"

She laughed, a casual laugh, but I could tell that she was uncomfortable, more at my frustration and anger than at my mystery. "Of course not baby. It was too cold to get out of the car," she remarked soothingly in an attempt to bring me back to my normal collected state. "Besides. I wouldn't know the first thing about playing a saxophone."

This was true. "Tell you what", she continued. You make sure the saxophone is all locked up for the night. I'll put a hair on the case rolled in a certain position, to see if it gets disturbed in any way."

Debbie wrapped her bare arms around me and began kissing me on my neck and face. "Relax, you little sax maniac. It's been a long drive." I melted. I met her mouth with mine and fell into her arms and charms.

The rest of the trip home the next morning was unspectacular. Sure, the snow laced countryside and white-laden pine trees gave a certain Christmassy feeling, but the magic in the air that had been there last night in the drive from Hobart was for the moment gone. The sax had stayed undisturbed from the night before, the strand of raven hair still tied in a bowline around the remaining working hasp, mouthpiece still unattached and dry, neck still in the special position it had been lain the evening previous.

But my mind raced in thought, I spoke casually, rationally. "You know, baby, it just seems weird... all the little things that have added up...the lady at the flea market, the lady here at the motel, all the sax music on the radio, and especially the sax case being opened and the mouthpiece still being damp, and the last straw was seeing sax players on TV. It's really weird. I just can't shake it.

"Maybe we've acquired a ghost," Debbie remarked equally casually. "I mean, what other explanation do we have?"

I laughed. "Alright, let's be scientific about this. It could just be one of those weird series of synchronicities; or maybe I'm just paranoid and weird. You know, those synchronicities things do happen. Tell you what, we'll start making a notation of any other weird things that happen concerning the sax, and we'll jot down all the things that have already happened, just to keep some sort of record. It could be interesting, and it could be fun."

"Sounds good."

"Done."

We discussed our science project on the rest of the drive home, making notes and discussing valid methods of scientific study for such an unscientific problem. Maybe the statements of the bug lady at the flea market could have excited some strange inner workings of my right brain, one even more awash by the wonderful saxophone music from the Portage Shakey's to Joliet's Motel 6. Maybe I had not closed the beige case in the trunk;

maybe the humidity from the snow had found itself naturally to the damp wood of the mouthpiece---Lord knows the old Chevy wasn't totally waterproof. The statement of the second bug lady at the motel could have been a mere coincidence, a reflexive statement made by a naturally intuitive personality---telepathy does exist, after all: Debbie and I had experienced many such moments of synchronous thought. And maybe the radio music, the guy playing the sax in the snow in Gary, and the sax on TV were all plain and simple, if strange, coincidences.

We finally reached home without any further weird incident. Even the radio had lain fallow for the remaining hours to Peoria. Some good rock and roll, an Eagles extravaganza, old Beatle songs, but nothing like the magic of the saxophone that had tickled the airwaves and our fancies the night before.

Debbie reached over and patted my arm as we un-packed. "Maybe the sax will play in Peoria, honey," she stated in her typical droll wit. We both laughed heartily. The whole thing faded from my mind.

Well, the old funky saxophone did play in Peoria. Quite well, in fact. I had it re-padded and the springs replaced as soon as I could afford it...Three hundred dollars isn't exactly something you throw around if you can't afford it. But what the hell, I figured I would do it while I was in the mood, otherwise it would never get done. I put it on one of my low-interest credit cards and didn't worry about it. I had gotten together with a few friends from work in a sort of quasi-garage style band and we had made some interesting tunes. It was a great Sunday afternoon distraction in good ole P-Town for a few months.

Then we all got the word at work. Our company, Exo-Tek, sold out to one of the Big Boys and if we wanted to keep our jobs we would have to re-locate to Austin, Texas. The move would allow it to work more closely with other computer firms there. All of us software engineers had the choice of either re-locating to Austin or drawing six-months severance pay. At thirty-five, I was much too young to retire and much too broke to live on six-months salary. At least I still had a job. If there was one thing my old man had stressed in me it was that you had to have a job. I talked it over with Debbie one night after our garage band had retired for the evening.

"You know, honey, the money will be any better but the cost of living is higher there..."

"Whatever you think, Steve. I'm sure that I can find a med lab tech gig there without any problem. Apparently Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the country."

"Well, what about your parents, and my mom? We'll be a lot further from them."

“They all can come visit. None of them is cripple yet. Maybe they'll even want to retire down there"

"OK, yeah, but Texas is such a redneck state. Those people may want to lynch us or something because of the way we speak."

"Get real, Steve, this is the Nineties"

"What about my band?"

"Steve, Austin is the biggest music town in the country. It’s the hometown of Stevie Ray Vaughn. And, I'm really tired of these cold winters. It would be really cool to be able to go swimming and cook-out in February. Besides, if Connie and Jake also want to relocate, then you have half of the rhythm section there with you. It won't be so bad."

"I'm getting the impression that you almost want to go."

"Yeah, I guess I am. I'm ready for a change. Illinois will always be my home state, but I'm ready for something new. I'm tired of having to worry about crack dealers and gangs ready to mug you at your every step. If we want to have kids, I’d rather deal with rednecks than gang members hyped up on crack."

"OK, so be it. I'll tell Krassmueller in the morning. You're sure, right? It’s ok with you?"

"Yeah, honey. Let's go for it. It'll be like an adventure."

So it was. The garage sale we had in Peoria was one of the biggest ever in town, so I am told by our bass player Kevin who stayed behind. All the stuff we had accumulated over the past ten years sold well, especially at our bargain prices. Debbie kept all of her unicorn collection, of course, and I kept most of my books and albums-- and yes, of course I kept the sax-- but everything else went. Beds, couches, tables, ---almost everything that we couldn’t pack in the U-Haul. On May 1st, we were on the road. Connie and her husband Clyde, and Jake and his wife Melinda and their two kids also made the trip. At least the band was semi complete. Jake’s drums and Connie’s synthesizer would at least provide the framework for a little continuity. I guess that we would have to find a bass player, but there were other things to worry about. I really needed to start thinking more seriously about work. I know that I wasn't the best software engineer, and it was going to be a competitive market trying to deal with people like Motorola, IBM, AMD, and the like. let's face it--- Exo-Tek was a but a popcorn fart in a wind tunnel when it came to the Big Boys; sure they had a lot a good stuff, like for instance their software programs for space-station construction, which I personally had designed and knew that no one had thought up off before, even if the time was not ripe just yet for it.

But I was but a small cog in the machine...Exo-Tek’s other stuff, like developing the prototype for clean room construction without having to worry about air distribution system failure--- was unique; something that I know Motorola was trying to rival for years. In fact, it was probably Exo-Tek’s biggest money maker, even though some of the smaller ideas it had were also starting to bear fruit.

Actually, the new set up in Austin was almost better than than the one Peoria. I had my own cube---not having to share it with two other people, and I also had my own computer, modem, and CAD. Those of us that went to Austin started getting bigger dividend checks, and the health insurance coverage also improved.

And then I developed The Algorithm. The idea came to me while I was playing Cleveland Maxwell’s Magical Sax.

EX NIHILIO

(McDonald Observatory, near Ft. Davis, Texas):

"We should have the bulk of this material from Hubble digitized in the next few days. There is an incredible wealth of new material here."

"Fantastic. I most certainly am looking forward to it."

(25 Miles southwest of Brownwood, Texas, near Mercury):

"Son, we are going to have to start paying attention to our electric bills. Your father lost his job and money is going to be tight for a while. You are going to have to turn off the lights in your room when you are not in there."

(McDonald Observatory):

"Wow, some of the images we are getting are incredible. There are gazillions of new galaxies out there we have not mapped before."

(Near Mercury):

"Why do I have to keep nagging you about turning off the lights in your room? What is your problem?"

"I am that I am, Mom."

(McDonald Observatory):

"What do you mean, NGC 1738 has disappeared? Check it again."

"I've already checked it a dozen times. NGC 1738 has disappeared. Gone. I can't explain it."

Me and my big mouth.

I just happened to mention to Amora that I discovered how we could access the Akashic Records via the Alpha State, scan them, and send them as an email attachment.

The idea was pretty simple, actually: Put out a mental "search" for any given document in time or space while in a dream state, eidetically photograph it with a click of the digital photo lens screen-shot with the data chip embedded in the eye, then retinally scan that mental photograph using a software derivative of the Archetypical Algorithm, and then and send it to the recipient to bring it into the conscious world.

Now she has given me a whole slew of things to look up. I'm stuck in front of the desktop for a long time.

I needed a drink.

THE MISSING BLUE LINE

Pretty slow Saturday morning. Gave out a warning ticket at 38th and Speedway. Let the lady go with a warning for speeding; after talking to her it was obvious that she had enough problems already. Lucky for her she didn't slam into that moving van.

Spent a few minutes taking care of the paper work on the motorist who lost a tire and axle on the access road; other than that, my shift was pretty routine. I was pretty anxious to clock in and get out to the Jimmy Morris golf course where Dubya B. and I were going to work on eighteen holes and a twelve pack.

Dubya B. had been my partner for the past twelve months; we just got switched around a few weeks ago and I had not had much of a chance to get together with him, so I was ready to relax and bullshit an afternoon away.

Dubya B Rivas was a one of a kind type of cop. The man was a character in and of his own right. Easy going, dedicated, highly intelligent---not one of those dumb brutes you often see carrying a gun and badge; Dubya-B actually had a little bit of snap under his vest. His real name was William Barrett Rivas, but went by "Double-You", a nickname which I think was given to him because of his bold poker playing, but it was a nickname I think that he readily accepted.

He told me once that he didn't like "William". "Hey, *ese*," he once told me, "What sort of Chicano has a name like William Barrett? That famous Alamo guy fighting Mexican people? My parents were trying to assimilate a little too quickly, I think."

He was kidding, of course, but there was a little grainy edge to his voice when he said that. I suspected that there was a bit of Freudian truth to what he said, at least according to my detective abilities. I realize that I had only been on the force three years, but I was going to make detective one of these days. Too much Hardy Boys as a kid, I guess, but I think that I have wanted to be a detective for as long as I can remember.

Dubya B. always encouraged it. He was content being a street cop, liking to work with kids from the East Side and trying to steer them right before they went wrong. He would amaze them by driving through the neighborhoods, using his siren as a musical instrument by cutting in on and off with rising pitches and crescendos, making the horn sound like a strange musical synthesizer. The kids loved it. A lot of them knew him by name. "Dubya-B! Dubya B!" they would shout as we drove by, running alongside the squad car as far as they could. Even the older street kids respected him. I know he was making a difference with them.

I was kinda sorry when they broke us up, but I guess we had to move on. As I mentioned, I wanted to be a detective. But this beautiful Saturday afternoon, it would just be two buddies getting together for a little R&R. I'm sure that we would talk about many things besides plain shop talk; I had been meaning to follow-up with him with an idea for an Austin Police Department musical band---Double-You B. could play a pretty mean saxophone when he had a few beers under his belt, and I had been practicing on my bass guitar for many years---not that any one of us was professional, but if we could get a band together it would be pretty neat for all the officers on the force. I had a tape to give him of old country swing songs---stuff like Tex Ritter, the Sons of the Pioneers, Gene Autry, and the like, even some of the more modern stuff like some songs from Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airman and Alvin Crow. We were going to officially bring up the idea in front of the next union meeting. The Austin Police Association was not a radical labor organization---what with us not having a collective-bargaining agreement with the City or anything, but they usually liked ideas of this nature which bonded the officers together. I am sure that we would get the idea accepted.

Dubya B. had worked the graveyard shift Friday night and early Saturday morning, but he would be rested up and ready to drive off at the first tee at 3 pm. That would also give me time to take a shower and change into some shorts for the hot autumn afternoon. I had reserved the green and we were ready to go.

When 3:l5 rolled around on my $3.99 digital watch, I knew something was not right. Double-You was late---something that he never was. It was a physical impossibility for him. If he even thought he would be a few minutes late he would invariably make a phone call. I guess he could have had a flat or something, but somehow I didn't think so. My proto-detective thinking caused a tingle of electricity to run across the nape of my neck, making the short hairs there bristle. I decided to make some phone calls of my own, starting with his home.

"Hello.", the voice of a young Hispanic female answered. Double-You's daughter Elena.

"Hello, Elena, this is Jack Harrington, Double-You's friend from work. Can I speak to him, please?"

"He's not here, Mr. Jack. He didn't come home from work yet."

Didn't come home from work yet? Something was definitely wrong.

"Can I speak to your mom, Elena?"

"Sure".

A thunk as the receiver was placed on the kitchen counter, and background music of B-93 radio.

"Hello".

"Yes, hello Teresa. This is Jack Harrington. Elena tells me that Double-You B. didn't come in from work last night. Is something wrong?"

"I don't know, Jack. It's not like him not to call." Teresa's normally jovial, melodic voice was strained and tense. "I called the station and they said that he didn't come in off of his shift. Sgt. Cox said he would call me as soon as he heard anything, but that's been six hours ago. I was hoping that he was going to meet you as planned."

"No, I'm here waiting for him. It's not like him at all....Tell you what, let me call the station and see if I can find out anything, and I'll call you as soon as I know anything."

"OK, thank you, Jack. I'll be waiting for your call."

"Don't worry or you'll make yourself sick, Teresa, I'm sure it's something simple. And see if you can keep the kids off the phone for a while". I was making a feeble attempt at humor in order to cheer her up.

"They've already ready been barred." Teresa attempted a chuckle. "Thanks, Jack."

I absent-mindedly hung up the receiver as numerous ominous options of what could have happened to Double-You raced through my cerebral cortex. Not signing in from his shift? That was an absolute no-no, in addition to being an unknown factor for Double-You. Not calling in? Was he beaten up or even worse by some punks? Did he have a wreck on a high speed chase? Did he go off and pull a drunk? Not like him either. On duty? No way. If Double-You was going to pull a drunk, it was with a case of Shiner in front of his TV set. I would just have to call the station.

I slid another quarter down the throat of the pay phone and punched out the familiar melody of the watch office. Got through to the watch commander with little delay. Like I said previously, it was a pretty slow Saturday afternoon, not that this evening would be the same, though.

"Hey, Sarge, Jack Harrington---you heard from Double-You B. at all?"

"Not a word, Harrington; he never came in this morning from his shift. I've got an APB out on him. Nothing at the hospitals. Adam-6 found his blue-and-white on the corner of Fifth and San Jacinto at about 3:30 this morning with the window rolled down and motor running and everything intact---its a wonder someone didn't steal the shotgun." Sgt. Sam's gruff voice was tired and as tense as Elena's had been. "I've been listening to his last radio communication, which came in at 3:28 saying he was following

a suspected parole violator---doesn't say much else---that's the last we heard from him. Adam-6 was his backup. Say, you want to pull a double? I'm trying to get all the available troopers out to cover this one. You'll probably be assigned to Missing Persons for the duration of this case. I've already cleared it with the Captain."

The Sarge must have been thinking about me. He knew that Dubya B. had been my partner and that we got along great, so he knew that I would have no qualms about pulling a double.

"Yeah, you bet. I'll be right down."

"Report directly to Captain Cummins in Missing Persons. He'll be the head honcho on this on. I think he's already got several swinging dicks out in the field. I think that you'll probably be plainclothes on this one; possibly even undercover. Come as you are." I heard a phone buzzing in the background. "Gotta another call. Catch you later."

The phone clicked dead, and I again placed the phone receiver back into its cradle. I was sure wanting to be a detective, but I was beginning to wonder if my baptism into the profession was hitting a little too close to home.

Dubya B. was missing. He had disappeared into thin air.

I got a phone call from the Captain later that evening after I got home.

“Hey Jack,” he intoned. “We’ve got a strange clue I want you to follow up on. Seems like Forensics found a business card on the visor in Dubya B’s blue-and-white.”

“Yeah, for sure. What’s it say?”

“OK, jot this down”.

I grabbed a pencil and piece of scrap paper near the phone. “Go ahead.”

“Urban Gorilla Advertising Company. A Project of Cleveland Maxwell Productions, PO Box 2640, Austin 78768. Email cmaxwell@momet.net.”

“Got it. Uh, Captain, what’s an email?

FINAL EXAM

February 25, 2018

TO: Engineering 3108

FROM: Prof. Cleveland Maxwell

Dear Class—

I am sorry but I will not be able to continue to provide these lectures for the rest of the semester. I have a pressing previous commitment which needs to happen. I apologize for this method of communication.

This is my final lecture for the semester and it is combined with your final exam. I hope that y'all will accept my apologies for this unorthodox method of teaching.

Let us review:

The basic math involved in the time travel data transfer mode algorithm writing software: (PS: Folks—I am sorry that we did not have the time to review Planck's Constant or Ohm's Law, but I trust that most of you have learned past these theorems. I am also assuming that all of you have the prerequisite course in tensor calculus.) So, let's review the Set Up for the Algorithm:

1) **Establish your temporal coordinates in numerical fashion: The most contemporary standard global time methods—no need to get exotic with Judaic, Chinese, Islamic, Gregorian, etc. dates. Establish your parameter date in this feed as per normal day to day life. For instance, it's February 25, 2018. This is best noted as 02252018.**

   Question #1: What alternate dating systems may exist? What are your individual temporal coordinates based on the lecture notes on this Final Exam? Develop the equation to convert these alternative dating system to the contemporary dating system.

2) **Now, establish the time coordinates in 24 hour "military" time. Don't worry about leap year coordinates, losing that 13 seconds per decade, yada yada. So, if it is 6:12 pm, it can be identified as 1812. (Best results occur when using an "atomic" clock. We've had pretty good results from that place in Colorado). (I will elaborate on this next semester).**

   Question #2: What alternate time systems may exist? What are your current time coordinates based on the lecture notes? For Extra Credit introduce your own theorems for integrating 'seconds' into the time coordinate equation.

3) **So now your date and time coordinates can be noted as 022520181812. Now you will have to position yourself in space—where you are at a given time. I've discovered that you can get very good results from the decimal system of global positioning software, but a lot of the mainstream GPS vendors seem to differ on their physical locations. I personally think that someone is jacking with the satellites. I really think that there should be an upgrade to a more sophisticated sidereal positioning system to correlate with the sidereal temporal coordinates. But as an example let us this imaginary location of +30.23235, -98.45191 and postulated in this form of geographical coordinates. Do not forget to account for your altitude for a correct three-dimension**

positioning. This numeral must be expressed metric form.

Question 3: What is your own geo-physical coordinate? Is there alternative geo-physical or geo-political positioning software? Extra Credit: What is your engineered idea for this development? Can these coordinates be determined by extending the digital wavelength?

4) **This was going to be tonight's lecture, but we will be moving a little quicker now. Last day to take an incomplete for this class is this coming Thursday. Now, let's look at both sets of coordinates for time-space. When combined with a yet to be defined set of numerical coordinates for "consciousness"—a trinity of sorts—[next semester], there have been some good results of data coordinates exported , transmitted, shall we say, to another time reference point. Interestingly, music itself is always the best catalyst for the transmission, and it appears that the transmission was as random as it gets. Since then I understand that there have been a significant number of monitoring stations established worldwide. The ethics of these monitoring stations for me have a very real impact of privacy invasion, or even the capability and ability to do it, but I do not have the time to address this here. There also seems to be some very interesting theoretical development of quantum thought, if any of y'all are interested. In a sense, this is how we got the telephone in the first place. Following that technological evolution one can develop a whole series of electronic innovations.**

Question 4: What other examples of this technological development can be based on these notes you provide? The trick question is your interpretations of the notes.

5) **So, let's look at the combined numerical definition of one's location in space-time at those coordinates: [022520181841+3023235-9845191]**

6) **A binary system does some things with these numbers. A decimal system does even more. But what if different mathematical system were analyzed? What if they were developed? Can, for instance, binary systems can be translated into digitized, decimalized, LOG-12 or other numerical systems? It seems that this would allow increased a) storage, b) reception, c) transmission, d) less energy. See the associated class notes from last Monday.**

Question 5: What other numerical system can be established?

7) **Applying the individual DNA sequences in decimal form to the physical application of the Algorithm: This may be a little trickier than one thinks, but this is the most integral factor of the teleportation process. The distractions by the "junk DNA" sequences will be tempting, and there will be numerous mitochondrial sequences, especially in the 16,255 to 16,294 range, that will tend to skew your programming. Remember, the end goal of your applications should strive to reach no greater than .0000017.**

8) **Question 6: The applications of an algorithm decimal-based system may possibly influence the time-space coordinate, based on Mrs. Hendrickson's paper. So, how does one re-write that part of the software program to reflect this? Please show your work, including the algorithm you developed. If there are issues regarding intellectual property rights, please send an email to**

me and cc it to the Department Head and the Dean for this school. We don't steal or own ideas here.

9) **Question 7: Develop a model of the frequency vibrations and amplitude variations to find a correct frequency to transmit these coordinates and data patterns.**

10) **Essay Question: In addition to the essay form questions above, this final essay will be based on the most correct forms of the latest edition of the Chicago Manual of Style and the Associated Press Style book. The subject matter for this final essay is: "Ethically, You Say." 1) What are the future implications? 2) What are the environmental and human implications 3) Should this software even be allowed? Who says? 4) Where are ethics today?**

As I have mentioned, I am combining my final lecture and the final exam unto one document.

This course may have been way over the heads of some of you. No problem, but, again, I am not going to re-hash Ohm's Law here. I expect most of you have taken the prerequisite courses prior to this point in the semester. Given the conceptual nature of this course, there are no wrong answers.

But if you do not turn in your answers to cmaxwell@moment.net **by the end of the semester you will get an F.**

Your grade is guaranteed as a C just by responding to this email exam with a sense of participation. Again, there are no wrong answers.

Those of you who would like this paper and exam to be applied as credit towards your doctor's degree please let me know.

Please give me a very good reason for an incomplete (i).

Next semester I am not sure I will be in the Engineering Department, for those who are interested. I am hoping to be back next fall, but will not be able to confirm that until August. I have to work this out with the registrar etc. etc. All of this is up in the air. There are a lot of other issues out there which may be requiring my more immediate attention.

I've enjoyed learning with this class. I urge you all to stay in touch with your ideas, yourselves, and your own minds.

Continue to Think!

Cleve Maxwell.

REPORT

The clerk just called back to confirm that indeed the Wi-Fi connection had been lost.

I am going back to analog basics to transmit tonight.

These people are a gentle folk but their technology needs a little enhancement to be compatible with our interface systems. I do not think that they are ready for what they call a “First Contact”.

Please note that my transmission media and vernacular have been adapted to local patterns to avoid any sort of misrepresentation.

I’ve adopted local speech and dialect patterns so as to integrate fully.

While most of my one-on-one interactions allow me to gauge these individuals as primarily a gentle and caring species, especially in local interface, it appears that they are ruled by an aggressive dominant elite class which controls all facets of military, political, and economic life.

My first recommendation is that any sort of “First Contact” avoid this dominant class integer.

The problem with the “First Contact” is that it will face charges of integrity, truth, and accountability so as to be summarily dismissed, or that it will be such a minor representative of the dominant class to be dismissed by the ruling coalition.

It must be acknowledged, according to existing scouting work, that any sort of “First Contact” will probably be ostracized and even abolished, even while control of this “First Contact” is shifted to the dominant class. The evidence to this effect has been well documented earth based references as Nuremburg 1516, Croatia 1615, Aurora 1897, Missouri 1946, Roswell 1947, New Hampshire 1962, Pascagoula 1973, Berkshire 1986, Sao Paulo 1987, and so on.

My second recommendation is that we approach “First Contact” with extreme caution; currently (051120172036) there exists an active global concerted effort towards a concentration of political, military, and economic power among the ruling classes in the various nation states. This existing control element appears to be suppressing international will and cooperation, especially in regards to economic and climate issues, and it will surely prove to be an impediment in any sort of contact endeavors,; all of it all appears to be based on archaic modes of economic exchange.

As we proceed towards the goal of an inevitable “First Contact” with this world-form, I would like to emphasize that unless the human experience gravitates towards a major paradigm shift towards the cooperative and away from the competitive, I can only conclude that this species and its terraform is doomed to suffocate in its own waste.

I will continue my work and mission here and transmit on a regular basis. I have mated here with an earth woman whose nature holds hope for this planet. I will not be returning to my post at the University but will remain here with the express purpose of attempting to shift that essential paradigm into the desired direction.

In conclusion, while I think that “First Contact” will and must be forthcoming, if it happened now it will be met by a military reaction by powers in locally nationalized control, and that fear and general panic among the general population will occur as a result of a disinformation campaign that will be waged by the existing control entities.

A more rational and philosophical approach to a First Contact will offer a warmer welcome, but I must emphasize that the window is rapidly shrinking between “First Contact” now with its inevitable scenarios and the oncoming climatic conclusion to this species and this global habitat.

I sign this with my usual signature and credentials.

"Cleveland Maxwell"

PS: I also recommend that we continue our program of individualized and personalized interaction with the current populace on this particular galactic Way Station. I am in steady contact with our other anthropologists and we have all concurred with the statements above.

My next report will appear at the required time.

PRELUDE TO DIFFUSION

The asshole in the next bunk wouldn't turn down his jam box so I unplugged it from the wall---violently.

I think the dude got the hint. I need to get some sleep.

It was going to be another rough one tomorrow. Got six loads of concrete coming in and two of the laborers got called in for Guard duty. So here I am with 18 yards coming in and 3 guys short. Of all the times that Griswold had to go throw a drunk.

Ironworkers said they would help if I bought beer. Had to negotiate with them at what time I would deliver the beer.

I had to get with Bobby to set up a defensive perimeter around the construction site. I know that all of the union hands will defend the jobsite. Not so sure about some of the laborers. They are ok on the job but will they fold under the pressure of an attack? They haven't joined the union.

Had to bring in the concrete from Portland. Via the back door of the blockade. Luckily no one got hurt. At least Portland is on our side. Someone told me that the Greenville site had been closed down.

We've got all of the engineers and their staff in a pretty secure location. They also have set up contingency plans of their own in the event of a breach. We can only do so much for them.

I wish I could say that all of the data center was ready. I know that at least generator power for the rest of the building is assured for an easy month if we economically use our power and also get the solar panels up and running

in time. I can assure y'all that there will always be essential source power for all critical functions.

And most of the higher level computer functions are operational. The engineers are still working on it and in reality this whole project is in the infancy stages. Independent Sky-Fi is assured.

But I have to say that we are really trying to combine a very complex synthesis here. We only can hope for the best.

I'll keep in touch.

"John Henry Fulkerberg"

Ch. 2. Obviously John Henry Fulkerberg is not my real name. In view of the current security situation, it's best we all use "pen names" for now. So, in compliance with your Directive, we are submitting this report as a cooperative. And because of the current situation, there may be several of us addressing the issue under a variety of pseudonyms.

Y'all know I have to write all of this down in a hurry. We are organizing it by chapters for easy reading reference. I am combining it with my work log.

Here is a quick recap –hopefully when things get back to normal I will be able to issue the more complete dissertation:

I really wish I had never discovered that algorithm. I say "discover" because it has always been out there and no one had caught it before, or maybe if they had caught it before they were reluctant to share it with the world. And I am not really even a mathematician.

But I have designed a few software programs or two in my lifetime.

You know, once you discover how the brain can be jacked like an awesome super computer then you can't fit in anymore.

I'll confess that I've always been a time travel nut, which makes this project all the more fascinating. Hooked on "Time Tunnel" a long time ago. It was always cool to follow those time-space paradoxes whereupon you shoot your grandfather or something and you would changes the course of history. But never in all my wildest imagination would I have ever thought that it would actually be possible.

Most folks thought, especially the best thinkers in the Invisible College, that the possibility for TT could only come about IF you used a massive, earth-consuming core of minerals and matter converted into energy. In other words, the planet would implode or explode, depending on the polarization of the charge in the matter you have just converted into super-electricity.

The reality is so, so, much simpler that it could be easily accessible by anyone with a brain. The concept allows one to visit the time space coordinates in the short-range past (still no go on the Future, I don't think—that part is still unwritten, unless you consider the alternative-universes-multiple-dimensions scenario.)

Basically, you had better start with a very good electrical ground. Better allow at least three points of earth contact in a minimum sized facility and of course allowing more ground wells as your size exceeds a certain number of square meters, but the engineers would know more on the details.

Then of course make sure your power requirements don't exceed your power use! I would definitely recommend at least doubling your electrical service to allow for future expansion. And I have found in trial sources that one has a higher efficiency rate if one does not use a carbon-based energy source…somehow it interferes with the carbon-capturing aspects of the electric service.

A far as the rest of the construction infrastructure, you probably need to talk to Bobby for the details. He's the job superintendent. I'm just the project manager and electrical GF.

I am the one to blame for all of this. It was my idea and my algorithm in the first place. I've brought a lot of people here who should really be with their families right now.

They really need to go home before we have to defend the organizational perimeter. Of course, since all of our homes are within the perimeter, this might just be a moot point.

What's with those assholes attacking us anyway? We won the last election. OK, so you don't like it, then take it to the courts. What is with all of these organized attacks?

My Grandfather told me about these folks. They are a pretty backwards tribe, a real nutty cult, even for this red-necked part of the country. Pops called them Nazis.

Ch. 3. We started backing up data as fast as we could. I think we got most of it. We put everything on a one of those old 1.5 terabyte external hard drives. We most definitely had to record it and store it somewhere.

We had to pull the hard drives out of several old Microsoft 95 models just for the un-hackable hard-drives, but it made a deep cut into our storage potential.

We send it all to an old analog hardware studio in San Saba Texas, addressed to a guy named Bobby, in 1983. I think most of that stuff there is still stored on those old 3 ½ inch disks. Given all the weird shit with the workings of the algorithm, it might even be the same "Bobby" who is the Superintendent on this job.

It worked! The first phase of information transfer via the resolution of all the quantum entanglement details actually worked!

Sorry—had to take care of an emergency. Bad rigging job caused us to dump a load of concrete on top of a port-a-can. We are going to be working all night.

The guy inside was not happy. Zi thinks it is the same guy who the crane picked up in the port-a-can last week and lifted him to the roof. He was kind of pissed off then, too.

So I have to order another nine yards of concrete RIGHT Now. Hopefully they will get here before 4 am.

Continuing the report. Turns out they sent it to San Saba, Texas in 1983. Don't *positively* know if it got there. All they know is that the transmission did go through at that g-sps/tps location. But receipt was confirmed by that slow moving dial-up system by the classified ad that was then placed in the local paper. But there has been no engineering confirmation.

Well, I hope that the backup works. If the engineers are breached and that data is seized, then we will be in a very rough spot. Especially if we cannot access the data transmission in 1983. This is where I really have to count

on that generator power at least until the engineers have secured what they need and they have isolated themselves.

Ch. 4. I have previously sent the conceptual data involved to the all of the G.E B. I understand that there is some confusion as to who received what. For the record, I am currently re-sending my synopsis of the primary mathematical concept that was involved in the development of the algorithm.

OK, I don't have the time to try and find the files right now, I hope you understand that I have a few other pressing issues to address right now, but here it is in a nutshell—I cannot provide technical data right now but I can give you an idea of how this concept materialized into a working form.

Please join me as I try to explain it to you. This will just be the basics:

1) Digitize the geo-physical coordinates. And do not use the global based system as it is not as accurate as the sidereal based system.
2) Digitize the temporal coordinates
3) Digitize the individual DNA coordinates of the select individual. For larger groups, like what we are trying to do, it is imperative that the variance does not exceed .000065 tetrahertz.
4) Digitize EKG and EEG rhythms. Synthesize these coordinates with the harmonic variables of the digitized DNA patterns.
5) Fine tune the correct Thz frequency for transmission and use this frequency to transmit the fully synthesized derivative of all the coordinates above from the select server's IP address. This is the critical part. You've got to find the right carrier wave to make the transmission. Best to use the base frequency and harmonics generated by that musical band in San Saba in 1983—it has proven to be the most accurate.
6) The positronic energy from the synchronistic data will provide more than enough power to overcome any residues of temporal gravity.

I am synopsizing this all again so that in the event that we lose all our data there will at least be these pieces to pick up.

Ch. 5: In my own defense I can truthfully say I warned them. I tried to put the science out there that the pingos in Siberia were fixing to go. They probably would have gone about 75 years ago if somehow some sort of truth had not prevailed and globally folks had agreed to work on common carbon-capture and methane-capture projects.

It hasn't been enough. There is great money in carbon and methane capturing, but no one would listen to me when I told them they really should do that to at least go through the illusion of saving the world. I guess we prolonged it by a few years—we could probably prolong it a few more years if they would let me finish this data center in peace! The big corporations never did go along with it. Exxon-Mobil-Shell gave the illusions of pursuing it, mostly through stock holder pressure. But they caved in the face of those lucrative methane mining operations in the tundra, even in spite of the international sanctions. The current fundamentalist administration did not help either.

So here we go—the whole world is liable to go up anytime in one massive earth fart that will literally run everything out of here. The methane emissions are reaching critical

level. We are going to need more than the canary in the coal mine to detect this one. You know how they say "light a match"? Well, I sincerely urge everyone to refrain from the use of any flammable materials while we are in this critical atmosphere.

Ch. 6. I am adding this note from one of the folks on the frontline to the record:

"After the city filed the lawsuit to obtain eminent domain access over the abandoned Levi-Strauss plants last November, we set up a producer's coop and a community hiring hall with some of the local farmers at that location. We set it up as a job-sharing endeavor, sort of like Uber. And they ruled in our favor at the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. It does not look like they are going to appeal it to the Supreme Court. They would probably totally lose it, based on what I think that the Supreme Court would rule, but a more than likely scenario is that they are going to employ a private security company----read that as a 'militia'--- to keep the Wobblies out of the complex. It would be a similar situation as what happened in Tuxon Bay last month. There the Nazis physically attacked us. They fired rubber bullets and guns at us-. We had a couple of hands hurt. The City did not endorse this. These were not city cops. In fact, if it weren't for the city cops who arrived 5 and ½ minutes later, it probably would have been a blood bath. They were hired thugs. I have video footage available upon request. I think that the same bunch of armed goons are the one who are currently outside the perimeter."

Ch. 7: Even If the time coordinates were received at 1983, I suggested to the Engineers that we re-send to several alternative tps coordinates. It would be best to have several backed-up locations. They can sit at the same geographical coordinates, but we can download to a variety of tps coordinates as long as they are within 50 meters of the sending coordinates. Apparently the old characteristics of WIFI-enabled systems will allow us to host them. I even suggested using The Cloud, which existed into the 2020's until it was totally co-opted by The Government and the corporations. But prior to that it was relatively secure. We would then be more ensured as far as the preservation of the data went, and it was highly unlikely that THEY would be able to access any of the data at those tps coordinates. Supposedly the site locations were carefully selected by some of the Higher Ups on the GEB. I am not privy to the time coordinates for security reasons.

I will remain on the perimeter until the data center has been secured.

Now there's another problem. Seems like someone pulled the "engage" switch before all the protocols were in place. Now there is a guy walking around with no security clearance in an antique cop uniform saying his name is W. B. Rivas. He says that he lives in Austin, Texas, and the year is 1981. We've got to figure out how to send him back before we do anything else. I've got Tim with him now. But if his story confirms out, we may have accidently gone beyond information transmission and actually moved physical living matter.

Ch. 8: The carpenters and sheet metal workers have finished building the initial Faraday Cage, and the electricians are grounding it now. I don't think that we

can be hacked remotely now, but the electricians will also be installing fail safe systems for this, and the software folks are programming the additional firewalls to prevent any viruses or malware attacks. We still need to disengage the fiber optics and the LAN Lines to finalize the Sky-Fi, but this is waiting for confirmation from Alexandra's crew. If nothing else I will take a hatchet to it in a very analog fashion if push comes to shove.

Zi tells me that Bobby is almost complete on the physical construction of the breastworks. Tim has armed some of the union hands in the event of a breach, to at least hold them at bay until we can energize after the data is secure. We are certainly hoping that it will never come to a major physical defense of the Data Center, but we have come too far to give up now. Everyone agrees. A few of the laborers have left to go to their families; I do not fault them for this. A lot of the other hands have brought their families within the perimeter. The place is now crawling with toddlers and pre-teens. We have put the teens to work. And we have set up a day-care center. And we now have a working food kitchen. Plumbers have finished earth-friendly septic facilities. It looks like we will be able to direct all of the captured urine into batteries, which makes us even more self-sustaining than I thought. And they are cooking some great stuff in the food kitchen.

We will eventually have to worry about water. Even with all the conservation efforts, and given the drought, we cannot count on enough water past six months. We won't have a pot to piss in. The solar condensate-capture pumps should be able to provide minimum for life support, but we REALLY need some rain.

Ch. 9. Number Nine. Always a mystical number. And it is even more appropriate right now since we are going to attempt the consciousness interface which allows the integration unto the computer systems. This has been the trickiest part of all. Right now it looks like we will only be able to transmit one person's consciousness back to 1983. The goal is the whole crew. Not sure right now if will require more synchronistic concentration for the energy transfer or more prayer, or maybe both.

I 'm not leaving unless everybody leaves. Someone will have to stay behind and clean up the legal stuff—and I guarantee you I am going to sue the shit out of several people-- "Foundations", corporations, and all around assholes. We will be financed for years to come.

If I were leaving back to 1983 I would simply take care of everything now so we wouldn't need the legal-stuff in 2060 because we would take care of todays' (2060's) problems years ago, if that makes any sense.

I did mention that the interface did not require energy nor power usage. In fact, it was input-energy intolerant. It shorted out every fuse and tripped every breaker. The proto-type failed. But when we discovered the "alternative" energy source--- which I think they determined to be anti-electrons in terms of spin, location, velocity, what they call "viscosity" and a few other things—that positronic stuff first developed by Cleveland Maxwell back in the Nineteen-Eighties, the interface fell right into place.

They based all of this on my algorithm, so I guess I am a little of the amateur mathematician.

Anyway, neither here nor there. I am written this down because nobody really listens anyway. But you can always put it on paper (I guess that I am still analog). And you can always encode it unto most any media. I understand that vinyl is coming back for the third time. Yeah, baby. If I had my turntable here I would definitely put on the Fats Waller, Howling Wolf, and Lightnin' Sam, and maybe some of that stuff by San Saba Sine-Wave. Maybe I will finally learn to play the guitar like them before they blast us into oblivion.

I don't expect that Nazi cult outside the perimeter will cut us much quarter. Maybe they will leave the kids alone.

This is really going to be a coin flip. On the one hand they will not push the perimeter because they know they would be badly damaged, and there may be will be the opportunity of peace, and they can set up their own county and we will set up ours. No wars, established trade perimeters. Smuggling laws work both ways. We both could be economically sufficient as a county to the point of even employing extending the cooperative bases.

And then here they are crossing the county line. With their cops—not even the state cops—and wanting to come in and basically take what they want based on their own law courts.

We could call in the state but they are more worried about how to check the gender of every child in public school to determine where the federal funding goes. I cannot believe that some idiot in the Legislature actually proposed that they install "stall monitors".

So we are on our own, spread out all over the globe. The lesson is obvious. The truth is here is that it is coming, whatever it is. We need to hang together.

Ch. 10. My wife tells me that it is 2 am and that I needed to get up at 4. I tell her I love her and that I was going to have a few more beers and see how the concrete pour was going. Portland finally got here for the second time tonight. I am not sure how they got through the blockade but they did and no one got hurt.

They are still holding steady. Greenville is still there too. I hear that there is street fighting in Alamogordo, but that Carrizozo is OK. It seems that the White Sand missile base has been told to stand down, since they are Regular Army and anything in Alamogordo would have to be a National Guard thing. Really don't have the time to give a full nationwide report right now, as I hope you understand. Besides you should have that already.

Finally getting shift end work reports from my subs—

Carl: pipefitters: punch list on install, work still on liquid nitrogen manufacturing plant. Need a few guys' with plumbing licenses to finish up the third floor; I've got a call in to the Hall. Hopefully they will get in through the sally-port.

Big Dog, electricians: On schedule; there will be extras involved for additional work, revisions, and while "we love the work, we could tell you engineers some simple tricks", he says.

Alonza: Laborers: we are 100%, on call, and The Best.

Ironworkers and Millwrights: Ben and Ronnie: 100% structural complete. Had to lay off a few guys from

ornamental iron, they will be back as soon as they can clear out of their motel rooms.

Carpenters: Bobby (Bobby is also the Carpenters rep in addition to being job superintendent.) Perimeter secure. Punch list with electricians and pipefitters tomorrow. Sheet-rockers have already started closing up interior walls and securing Faraday Zone. I am happy to report that all gps specs, via the engineers, are within .00015 % accuracy.

I told Bobby that we need at least .0000017% accuracy to achieve minimum molecular interface. So we may have a construction delay here. Those faraday cages don't install like the plastic bags at Wal-Mart. Every microbial change of over .00001 can actually create time-space contortions which can really fuck everything up, but I think we can operate for the entire crew at least .0000062. But I really would love to have that back up energy base to be on the safe side.

Still trying to finalize the synthesis of that random pattern to the quantum level, but this may not happen this morning.

One thing I need to emphasize to all of you at the GEB: Nicely: Y'all need to get a better concept than your top down micro-managerial approach. This ain't no day at the beach; but it could end up there if we don't do this right. We have that very small margin of error. I would feel better if the algorithmic variables were a lot closer to .000007 to allow for the Random Factor. I think that this would be a guaranteed failsafe for 30% of the crew.

I really don't want to think about this option.

And let us not ever forget that "Random Factor". In this scenario, no biggie. It is what it is. But within the quantum variables we have applied to the consciousness logs, we really think that anything above .000007 starts going beyond the possibilities into the quantum-undefined space of probabilities. We should be able to isolate these potential anomalies when we get the probability waves to harmonize with the quasi-crystal plasma modules.

I am also sending this last transmission to the Folks on the defense perimeter, so that are aware of the latest developments. Also sending to the Red Caps, just in case.

Ch. 11: Well I don't guess I will be getting any power-naps tonight. Somebody started shooting in the south east quadrant. Zi just ran in and said that two of our people are down; one critically. Tim's guys have moved in and there is no further breach. Rules of Engagement were not invoked. Tim says that they get One Free One. After that he requested as to when to invoke the Rules of Engagement. I told him that this appeared to be a defensive matter rather than a construction matter, but since I was also the project manager for the defenses, I appointed Tim General Foreman of the Defensive perimeter and granted him the permission to invoke the Rules of Engagement after the Third Strike.

I have notified Human Resources of the change in Tim's wage scale.

I have also transferred about a dozen hands to Tim's Command.

"John Henry Zuckerberg", Cmdg.

Ch. 12. Sometimes I just hate dealing with the money people. Even the engineers can be a pain. Sometimes I can think and remember, sometimes I forget to write down my reminders. I didn't write it down when I designed the software. That's where the Engineers and their liaison Alexandra was supposed to take care of. I originally wanted to do it, but someone had to pad the payroll and put a bunch of middle management folks in the way. Now things take twice as long.

And one things that really chaps my ass is that no matter what political faction you vote for they all come back to whining about the budget.

Ch. 13: I really wanted to sleep for a few minutes. I have to get up in an hour and half.

OK Zi comes in with a Report from Alexandra, who went home to take care of a family issue. I really don't have any jurisdiction on the wage issues; they need to be sent up the ladder to the foreman, the general foreman, the superintendent etc. etc.

Zi says that this is more policy stuff; she already informed the GEB on-line staff who advised to immediately inform all personnel to make note of this possible labor violation. I understand through Chris that all this stuff has been to the secretariat and they are awaiting my final job transmission of this report.

They really don't know what is going on here. I don't know what is really going on here.

I do know I saw a very dark explosion to the NNE. Was not at one of ours. I can't explain it but I've got the superintendent on it. Does not appear to be job related, via the established channels, but it really appears to be an intimidation attack by the Nazis.

I cannot confirm or deny anything because of confidentiality agreements. But I did not violate any NDA by reporting the aerial phenomenon.

OK. I will not send the basic of the request from the GOB regarding the essential charter of this work group tonight; I hope you understand. I will try to go back to sleep.

Ch. 14. Reports back from the medical staff indicate that the probable side effects from the gps/tps coordination study indicate that side effects included headaches, increased appetite, and increased libido. Some nausea and disorientation probably related to the study were also indicated, but there is not enough data there to make a cogent study analysis.

I pushed the energize button. I think that I'm in contact with the mainframe right now. There are interlocks to and from our matrix but that is another report.

(This key board appears to be dysfunctional chrt. Please forgive obvious typos. I've requested one at least 3 to 4 weeks ago.)

Got a note from Zi that ey have know required that all inner office communicatiosn be communicadted digitally onl;y. Now they are pissing me off. They wont send me the f*CKING keyboard and expect me suddently be gps/tps compliant. I can only do what I can do. If they REALLY are pushing me to go analog for all their communications.

Hey, the keyboard appears to be working again. Suddenly no errors. Firewall must have halted any breaches. You know, this would not be the first time that the hacking

breached us. One of the field foreman filed a report on this last week. Something about being hacked. I will look up that report and send it to you ASAP, but probably not before 5:30, and we all know that all shit is going to happen at about that time. I've got Debbie working on it and will send it.

In other news, here at 4:30 am, all previous reports have been archived according to company policy. In the event of a breach, we will be really ready to launch the database to a pre-Y2K data storage facility, possibly in addition to the previously mentioned 1983 repository in San Saba.

That extra nine yards of concrete finally got here.

As per our archival protocol, this archival collection post, July 21, 2060 is mandated to the next data entry poster.

I really need to take a nap.

Or not. Debbie just brought me that report about a hacking incident last week. The author of the communication is not known. It is attached below for the record:

"Holz Shit Ive been hacked into the main frame.

Things are not what thez appear.

How am I supposed to keep a log on this_. I cannot even tzpe.

Holz shit. Ive just been hacvked into the mainßframe. , he repeated.)please see catlog notes 232ß333=)(üüÜÜUU We have no DATA üüü??RECOVER PROTOCOLS***

The analog variables being what thez were-are, thez were totallz able to access the mainframe.

Somebodz reallz needs to do a reßfresher course on analog for the newbies.

I guess when ever folks figure out the encrzption, accessibiltz will be pretzz much universal.

Right now , canonlz submit mz report back fro San Abatonio

I apoligiye for obviolsz technological anomilies. Mz kezboards is acting real squirelz. I think I have been be hacked or mz frequencies have been compriomised.

Please do not respond back via these channels.

So, what sort of report can we laz down hereÖ OK 10 Donät use the current address for pazrooll. Union guzs dontä like and neither does seniot on jop staff. Mz RecommendationÖÖÖ Please adhere t the contractö job will generate mnore profit that zou want, but thehands saz zou will have to give some back.

And all these stuff frm the engonnereers need to be documented as well for billing…

DIGITAL KEZBOARD DISABLED: PROTOCOL REVERSAL TO ANALOG: 9SEE BRODCATISJNG FREQUENCZ AT

ÜüUU9üÜ*VIA secured fiber network,

I reallz think that thez are using electronic interence on us to prevent tramnsmission via legitimate caghnaels.

Will trz backbackchannel in later submission.

Looks likek I am wring code or something. It is not me. It Is the Kezboard. Be advised. The Alphabet has been

hacked on a whole lot of kezboards. I am at the point where I can onlz delivez current data.

Czrene)please see mz coordinational information at the GOB:=).. Kezboards are DEFINITELZ fTckig up!! Be advise of verz, verrz,possible data breach.

DIEßssengageNGAFEproton Neuetr5%Ö Kezborad compromised, This is final xcccmission. DATadatbREACH:

Repeat X MissionÖÖÖßßUnknoownn datata braCCCH"

So it looks like there has been some previous efforts at hacking into our systems.

I am going to take a nap. Others will contribute to log reports.

"J.H.Z"

Ch. 15: - DFTSolstice06212060.2039.gpsstandard@cooldude.net

The random email-generation thing seems to be effective. Something we picked up from the telemarketers. We seem to have been able to apply it to our advantage as well as get the telemarketers to sign a non-disclosure and intellectual property agreement.

They do not want to go up against our legal team.

Duly noted and recorded.

"Big Fat Black Cat"

Ch. 16. Documental Reference is made to SSARI Files for sequential and non-sequential entries. Proper ID will be required.

SSGT on Duty. My logs are filed separately.

Ch. 17: I am going to testify that my gps/tps coordinates are currently 06212047.2113.GEOStandard. It was in somebody's office area at those coordinates.

It appears that there has been a successful quantum sized data transmission that confirms telemetry specifications to this gps/tps coordinate. I can document and confirm that out first attempt at this data transmission effort has regressed us in at almost exactly 13 earth years, to within a few microns of programmed destination.

Logging out: AMBeauchamps

Ch. 18: I need to report here that recording a time-space coordinate in infinite space is not currently possible. We managed to isolate it to a working sphere above the earth, and developed the software for the satellite telemetry accordingly.

Of course, since now that the technology is on the open market, every fruitcake and his dog are going to want to try it. That's why I recommend that the technical aspects of this log remain off the books.

I can and must report, however, that based on the evolved technology of the Quasiparticle Technology Group, we can confirm that location AND direction of the Uncertainty Principle can be determined using the algorithm developed by one "John Henry Fulkerberg".

Logout:// Senior Engineer

Ch. 19: LanceCrp#330560. You can twitter me @ #X330560 :

Do not believe some of the stuff you are hearing. I may lose my job here, but we are not really under attack per se under attack. We are attacking THEM. We are going to enter The Matrix. It is true that there has been some sort of retaliatory raiding and they are currently attempting to breach our perimeter.

Ch. 20: I take a 15 minute catnap and suddenly they are talking about re-energizing the Barnhouse Effect. That concept has never been proven. It is all the imaginary concept of a gifted writer.

Or is it? I don't know anymore. This is definitely above my pay grade, if I was getting paid in the first place. (I need to talk to HR about this)

The premises of the Barnhouse Effect are valid and there is some documentation via the testimony of an unknown OTR driver in north central Texas in the late 20th century. Additionally, the nature, identity or location of this Cleveland Maxwell cannot be finalized, other than his confirmed location in San Saba Texas, at the "Capshaw Cattle Club" in 1984. His association with one "Bobby" at the San Saba Archives and Research Institute is documented. He is definitely under the radar. A random WayBackMachine search turns up some other documentary evidence. Whatever happened at Ft. Sill at that time is beyond the scope of this log entry and remains classified.

I do not have any further information on this so –called Peace Generator. Please do not ask me about this again.-

"J.H.Z"

Ch. 21. "Kathy Longmire, XBOX News: There appears to be some sort of altercation inside the perimeter of the Diffusionist Compound. Reports of attacks from a so-called Nazi militia have been confirmed in at least three locations and those attacks have been contained by local police. The city is still relatively stable, but the mayor and two members of the city council could not be reached for comment; reports having them leaving the city, this in the face of pending reports that Federal Officials would soon be taking charge of the investigation. Kathy Longmire XBOX News."

Ch. 22: The asshole in the next bunk decided to crank up his jam box again at 5 am. He was entitled. He had to go to work, and half his crew did too. I had just napped off at 4:30. Eeesh.

At least they have good coffee here.

Mike Quill.%$@netscone--//.com

Ch. 23: I should have made time to say "la tuya" to him, but De Leon will document my official report. I will most certainly talk to HR about this; my shop steward will be invoked under the Kilgarten Rule. I also have the cell phone footage—well, at least half of it. This is my individual report to the GEB in response to the

one filed by the constabulary on duty that evening.

Be it also advised that in the event that the ruling of my shop steward is sold out, I reserve the legal right to have the Industrial Workers of the World represent me in all disputes involving labor and wages.

X02881285.6

Ch. 24. Could someone tell me who this Amora Corazones is? She keeps popping up throughout the compound trying to get us to access SOME SORT of password for the correct data to achieve .0000007. She is also claiming to be a friend of Cleveland Maxwell and she is also confirming that the first data transmissions have been received and are stored in San Saba in 1983. She insists to send all data to cmaxwell@moment.net to ensure its safe storage and preservation.

I think they are calling this "Chapter 25" but it's really my Foreman's Log for this date: --

Things are getting really critical here and I am writing this in a hurry.

OK, at about 1850 I started this log—[See data base and daily analysis for citations], and check the DFT Logs dot\r details.

But here is my shift report: At about 1638 there was a disturbance between the Ciranova and McNamara families, which was diffused at 1658. I was going to put it in my report of 1700, but then they told me it had to be logged into my report of 1645.

Job foreman reported the report as follows:

I know that I am the agent of charge for this contractual agreement, and all other documentation can be provided accordingly.

Anyway, officially, here's the deal. From my report of 1600 mas o menos. Here's what happened:

They breached the walls. Were able to sequester the mainframe techies. Some of the senior staff arrested. My crew and I went home.

ALL DATsecured/ Q Q,d you r zould,not believe zhqt they discovered:

ÏT LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER CON-TROM ATTEMPT.+ contact ''HOMEBASE"

My report ends here. We must begin our evacuation.

PS: I do not know what happened to the senior staff. They should have all been transmitted out by now. I am energizing now.

From Yiö : Final Report. I can confirm that keyboards are expressing random variables. Expressive of an external attempt for unauthorized access.

Cannot call in technicians till 7 am, but they need half-hours notice. No contractor is available here. I hope these guys are good.

BUG OUT NOW. ALL HANDS BUG OUT NOW. FOLLOW YOUR EVACUATION PROTOCOLS.

Ssystems have been attackeddd.

This maz affect mas all data transmissionsnns. Especially the llllongrange back to 1983. They have disryupptied all systemmms…….

These distorted transmissions are not from the filed. Thez are here in the office. They are coommmiiinng from the exxxtenall fiibire network;000

)ÜÜSeee ProtocllsCODE”7777BbbAlofthisisradomÄÖÖÖÖ???____

They have breached the inner perimeter. The last of us are evacuating now from the interior labs at the faraday cage. We have not finalized anything so there is no telling where in the world we will all end up at—I am hoping to rejoin my wi

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

August 12.

Maybe I should not have done it in the first place.

I knew I could make Trinidad in about 12 hours. I could stay overnight there and be back in Little Rock by Sunday night.

Well, I did it anyway.

Got to Trinidad about 5:30 pm and went to the dispensary. I only picked up an ounce—I mostly gave it up in my younger partying days but I sure was going to enjoy a little bit of it now, even if the main reason for getting it was for my wife’s non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

After I picked up a six pack, I settled in to the Day’s Inn and unpacked, setting up the coffee pot and getting ready for the ride home tomorrow. I decided to check out the stuff. I was amused by the notice at the motel desk about being charged for smoking in the rooms, but they had a designated smoking area, which I used right about dusk.

My first red flag was raised when I walked back to my room. There was a pickup truck from TJ’s Mechanical backed up to the swimming pool with its lights off, engine running, and two people inside. OK, so maybe the two dudes were also enjoying a little smoke after work.

Got up to my room on the second floor and started relaxing. I called my wife.

A strange clicking noise happened on my cell phone. That was weird. That never happened before.

“Hi honey, how are you feeling?

“OK I guess, where are you?”

“I’m in Trinidad. How’s everything there? “

"OK. I'm feeling a little run down after the chemo. But I'm eating OK."

We chatted for about twenty minutes.

"When will you be home?"

"Probably about 6-7 pm tomorrow. Do I need to pick up anything?"

"No, I'm good. I think I'm going to bed."

"OK, love you, honey."

"Love you too."

I plugged in the phone charger in and proceeded to do the daily email on the laptop.

The log-in instructions from the desk were strange: "If you are unable to access your Wi-Fi, log in with the guest password of "ICEguest". But I was able to log on without any further problems.

Well, that was strange. ICE log-in?

Anyway, I looked outside to see if the car was ok. The truck from TJ Mechanical was still there. The lights were still off and the engine was still running—I could tell by the vapor coming from the tailpipe in the cool Colorado air.

Holy shit, was that camera in the thermostat? The thermostatic controls to the air conditioner came from the wall unit. Was this an old thermostat? The electrician in me had to investigate and I took it apart. That most certainly did not look like a thermistor, old or new. Thermistors don't have twelve wires going to them, as far as I know, but this one did. Well, call me paranoid, but I most certainly did not want to have anyone see me naked getting out of the shower. I've seen those stories on *60 Minutes*. I covered the sensor with the electrical tape I had in my toiletry bag.

Just out of curiosity, I glanced outside the window again. The truck from TJ Mechanical had its lights on and was slowly leaving the parking lot. This after sitting there in the dark with its engine running for at least 3 hours, leaving seconds after I had taped up the thermostat. Hmmmm.

The next morning I checked out, sober. Maybe I had just gotten a little paranoid---Pot will do that to you, especially since I had not smoked in umpteen years. I dismissed further paranoiac thoughts as I drove home, but I did watch my speed and my rear-view mirror all the way home. Paranoid or not, the last thing I needed was to be busted for talking an ounce of weed across state lines.

The black BMW followed me at the same distance and same speed all the way into Raton Pass. I was a little hung-over and decided to let it slide. The rest of the trip was uneventful.

August 16

"Hey honey, I'm going to run to the store. Do you need anything?"

"We're out of orange juice."

"OK, be back in a few minutes. Love you."

While I was paying for the groceries my wife texted me saying that the FBI was raiding the house and that there was a warrant out for my arrest. They did not say what for. They took the desktop, the laptop, and the tablets, all my papers, the stuff in the garage file cabinets—everything.

I know that I did not do anything illegal; it could not have been the marijuana. This had to be political. I did not even respond to her text, assuming that the phones were being monitored.

This was it. It had finally happened.

I called the Party office. There was no answer. I left a message, assuming that they would get back with me. I quickly left the store and went and parked on a remote county road.

The text came back, short and terse, from a different number:

DITCH PHONE IMMIDIATLY.

I quickly removed the SIM card and the memory card and tossed the phone into the running waters of Little Fourche Creek. Thank goodness for the recent rains.

Then I knew what I had to do. This had all been discussed years before. Then I backtracked about 15 miles.

I ditched the car at Bill Farmer's ranch and traded it for his older pick-up which I knew had no gps unit. Bill did not ask any questions. He knew what to do. He also gave me about two thousand dollars cash. I shredded all my credit cards and tossed them and the SIM cards into his flaming burn pit. I knew that Bill would destroy the gps on the car immediately and chop-shop rest of it..

Then a couple of hours drive via the back roads to the Wal-Mart in Conway where I bought the burner phone with cash. It would do in a pinch.

A quick text from me to the last message I received:

INSTRUCTIONS.

The reply came back a quarter-hour later from yet a third phone number:

ZAPATISTA LOCAL IN LIL ROCK COMRPOMISED. CONTACT SAM FAUBUS COMBS AR. AT STORE WITH THREE HEADLIGHT FLASHES. ORDER BACON CHHESBURGER NO ONIONS OR PICKELS. GIVE 10$ TIP.

Well, that was strange.

While driving to Combs I listened to the news on the truck's old AM radio. Not really much to go on; something about a terrorist attack in Baltimore and that they were investigating and rounding up suspects.

Finding the store in Combs, Arkansas was easy. There was only one. A pimply-faced kid of about 16 came out to the car window after I flashed my lights three times. I ordered the burger as specified; the kid said nothing the whole time.

The burger came out and smelt delicious. I was hungry. As instructed, I paid for the meal with the large tip. Now what? I ate the burger right there in the parking lot.

The kid came back a few seconds later with a handful of napkins, still silent.

I wanted to use the phone to call my wife, but that would definitely be a bad idea. I would have to wait. I really did not know what is going on. Was there anyone on the National Committee that knew what this raid was all about? It was like ANOTHER Palmer Raid thing.

The National Committee and the National Office knew about this possible scenario for the longest time and as usual sat on it for who knows how long. So now the FBI is breaking into my house because somebody in the fucking national office forgot to do the paperwork. Really?

As I wiped my face and hands after the burger, I noticed the penciled lettering on one of the interior napkins: SEE SAM FAUBUS AT THE CEMETERY.

It was getting dark, and I was headed to an old spooky-ass Arkansas country cemetery in the middle of nowhere. This was going to take a six-pack and some of the Trinidad stuff which I had wisely tucked with me.

Of course! Sam Faubus at the cemetery. I was looking for a grave. And yes, there it was, the grave of Sam Faubus. There was a note under a rock on the headstone:

STAY PUT FOR NOW. WORKING ON YOUR ROUTE TO OREGON. THINGS HOT EVERYWHERE. PATRIOT ACT INVOKED AGAINST THE PARTY. ESPOINAGE ACT, MANN ACT, RAP BROWN LAW, INSURRECTION ACT, CRIMINAL SYNDICALISM LAWS AND KENNEDY-ERA EXECUTIVE ORDERS ALSO INVOKED TO JUSTIFY CURRENT ACTIONS. NATIONAL OFFICE RAIDED BASED ON INFORMER INFO. NATL CHAIR AND SECY COMPROMISED; FLIPPING ON MEMBERS. STAY OFF ELECTRONIC MEDIA! SAY YOU ARE SAM FAUBUS'S GREAT NEPHEW.

I slept in the truck that night. Once I got over being spooked by the raccoons, there was something very peaceful about sleeping in a graveyard.

Aug 17.

The old lady in the well-waxed vintage lavender Chrysler Imperial came in early and asked if I was any kin to Sam Faubus. I said that I was his great nephew, as instructed. She then asked why the hell I would go to sleep in a grave yard. She looked like something out of Driving Miss Daisy.

I waited there for a day and half for her to come back.

8-19

When she finally came back she brought be a couple of sandwiches on homemade bread and told me that Sam Faubus had said for me to go to the Fort Smith IBEW union hall. I am to take the call to the remodel at the Ft. Smith public library. I am to contact the "Wobbly Shop Steward", who apparently drinks a lot.

She said to be sure to finish my sandwiches.

There were three burner phones in the paper bag. And a USB with a post-it on it which said, "Use When Instructed".

I took the back roads to Ft Smith.

Aug 22

I am finally able to report again. I am submitting this information to the State Committee for its archival review, and I understand that there can be no review if I do not submit a written report accounting for certain questionable expenses. But then I do not even know if there is a state committee anymore.

It looks like we have gone officially underground.

Wobbly at Ft Smith told me to get in touch with Bill Benefield in Martha Oklahoma. He said I would know how. He gave me a lunch box with sandwiches and a 9 mm pistol/

It can't happen here? Well, it just did. Never let your guard down.

Aug 23

Dumpy motel near Stratford OK. A/c is broken. No hot water, but right now cold water is just fine. Found an old typewriter to do my report.

Took a lot of back road and doubled around a few times just in case. Should see Benefield tomorrow.

So, am I paranoid or is the organization really controlled by a small sect of money hungry con-artists and govt. agents?

Who knows, but they certainly are not any help right now.

I have a feeling that they have been raided as well, but I simply have not been in contact with any of the folks in charge.

I did send out a note to the national office before this all happened…It should be documented somewhere. Paranoid me is thinking that this is how they got my info and the reason they raided my house and issued a warrant for my arrest.

I am gett8jg no help at all here. None. My only cotact to the organization is –I'll call him/her "Agent Zero" who is guiding me to Oregon via text.

August 24

At the Martha cemetery found Bill Benefield. Plastic bag hanging over the headstone has another burner phone. I've been changing them everyday. Text from Agent Zero says to refer to notes from the lady in Combs. I know why she said to finish the sandwiches. Two pieces of paper, one in each sandwich.

Agent Zero also said to stay off interstate and large highways.

We've been prepping for this analog back-up for years. At least I have; I don't know if the National office has. But they are saved somewhere. I am not posting anything to the net.

OK, found the sandwich notes. I am to see Albert Stonewall Bradford Jr in Peacock, Texas. Looks like I am headed south. I am to ditch Bill Farmer's truck and the phone after this message. There is a cavalier with the keys in it parked at the entrance to the cemetery. Lunch box on the back seat has food.

Aug 25

At the Double Mountain Cemetery there is an ice chest full of food and drink. There is another note from Agent Zero in A. S. Bradford's flower urn:

LONG ROAD AHEAD W/O CONTACTS. AVOID LUBBOCK! IT IS ON LOCKDOWN! GO TO TATTOO PARLOR IN LOS LUNAS NM AND PICK UP ONE OF THE FLYERS. FOLD IT TWICE; ASK FOR ROXIE. AVOID ALL CITIES! NATIONAL GUARD ON ALL MAIN HIGHWAYS, USE BACK COUNTY ROADS.

I have ditched the phone again.

This underground railroad shit is really starting to tire me out. I do not know what is going on in the larger world view. There is nothing at all about this in the news.

I am tired of sleeping in flea bag motels, even if they not share their information with the cops; I have to pay cash, and I am running out quick, but at least their air conditioners are cold---usually. I do not need the knocks on the door asking me to be someone's date, though. But so far our underground railroad network goes, be it what it may, it is still intact. I get another phone and a different car throughout this trip.

8-26

A lot of Natl Guard vehicles between Aspermont and Clairemont. They were all headed in the opposite direction. Radio news said there were riots in Abilene and Ft Worth.

It was a long drive to Los Lunas, but there was enough traffic so as not to be standing out.

Aug 28

There are two tattoo parlors in Los Lunas., but only one had flyers. After I folded the flyer two times I asked for Roxie, who was working on a biker in the back. I had to wait while she finished her artwork on the guy's forearm. When she stepped outside for a smoke, she said would drive me to the Acoma reservation to see the Water Seeker; she says that Peewee Crowhawk at Window Rock sent him a text and he is expecting me but it was going to be a well-traveled highway and I am to

stay covered in back seat of her Traverse. I am to make contact with the mudheads there.

Gosh, she is a very attractive woman.

8-29

I seem to be doing a lot of back-tracking, but I think that it is in everyone's best interest.

But I really don't know why I am still running. I could just accept the warrant and deal with it in the courts. Agent Zero says that it would be an instant death warrant; it would be a guarantee to become one of the Desaparecidos.

I do not know what is going on.

I think that the Party has evaporated and scattered to the winds. Anyone who has not been compromised is definitely underground.

I know that they are monitoring my wife's phone. I do not dare to call her.

I'll report again when I can. I will try to rendezvous with the cells in Oregon as per my initial plan.

The Water Seeker and mudheads have provided me with much needed supplies for the next step of the railroad, including extra gas. Roxie has given me the Traverse and her I-phone. I am to use her email address for communication. It was not long before I received a message from Agent Zero:

From: Cleveland Maxwell [mailto:cmaxwell@moment.net]
Sent: Friday, August 28, 2020 8:19 PM
To: zydecozeppelin@att.net
Subject: Talk to Utah

LONGEST PART OF YOUR ROUTE. 18 HOURS THRU DESERT. GO SEE UTAH PHILLIPS IN NEVADA CITY.

TRAVEL SECONDARY ROUTES. AVOID TOWNS. DO NOT STOP WHERE YOU CAN BE SEEN.

UTAH WILL GIVE FINAL TRIP DESTINATION.

BE SAFE; THIS WILL BE THE WORST PART.

9-1 The back roads thru the Navajo reservation are dusty, unpaved, and rough, but there is no traffic. But it is some pretty nasty driving in some places. I took it slow; I had enough gas and water. I made it to Coyote Springs late in the evening.

From: Cleveland Maxwell [mailto:cmaxwell@moment.net]
Sent: Sunday, September 1, 2019 8:36 AM
To: 'Zydeco Zeppelin' <zydecozeppelin@att.net>
Subject: RE: Next stop?

I AM SETTING UP STOPS ON THIS RAILROAD NOW. THERE ARE OTHER FOLKS ALSO ON THEIR WAY. WE ARE LOOKING AT A RENDEZVOUS IN PORTLAND VIA CALIFORNIA; STILL SECURE FOR US THERE. NOT SURE HOW LONG. VANCOUVER PROBABLY UNTIL WE CAN FIGURE THIS OUT.

From: Zydeco Zeppelin [mailto:zydecozeppelin@att.net]
Sent: Sunday, September 1, 2019 8:32 PM
To: Cleveland Maxwell <cmaxwell@moment.net>
Subject: Re: Next stop?

There are some strange people looking around. Motel clerk is wondering why I paid cash. Had to give her some

story about having bad credit. I have enough cash from the slush fund. Where am I to go?

On Sunday, September 1, 2019, 08:39:25 PM CDT, Cleveland Maxwell <cmaxwell@moment.net> wrote:

WILL BE IN TOUCH. STAY AT SAME MOTEL FOR NOW. THINGS HECTIC. EMAIL MAY BE COMPROMISED.

From: Zydeco Zeppelin [mailto:zydecozeppelin@att.net]
Sent: Sunday, September 1, 2019 8:28 AM
To: cmaxwell@moment.net
Subject: Next stop?

OK I have made it to Coyote Springs. Now what? I need to call my wife.

WHY DID THAT WOMAN TAKE A PICTURE OF ME AT THE DINER?

9-3

Just past Carson City. There is a roadblock up ahead; looks like right on the California border. No way to get around this one and not be noticed. There are cops all along the side of the road.

There was quite a line. They were searching everybody and everything, Holy shit, there sure was a lot of military types with automatic weapons there, even several armored vehicles.

Now what? I had to do something quick.

I used Roxie's phone and began texting my emergency number.

"9-1-1 I AM SURRUNDED AN ABOUT TO BE COMPROMISED. NO WAY IN OR OUT"

Why wouldn't they answer back? It's been five minutes. Then the answer came back:

"THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE. FOLLW OW INSTRUCTIONS EXACTL;Y. TURN ON YOUR PHONE LOCATION AND ACTIVATE THE WI-FI. PUT A DROP OF SPIT ON YOUR PHONE CAMERA SO THAT WE CAN PICK UP DNA SEQUENCE. PLAY THE MUSIC USB YOU PICKED UP IN ARKANSAS. WHEN THE SEQUENCE HITS C SUPER C HIT SEND. AND HOPE IT WORKS. WHEN YOU GET THERE, KNOCK THREE TIMES ON THE DOOR."

"QUEEN'S BISHOP GAMBIT WITH AN ACE IN THE HOLE."

Whatever that last statement meant I had no clue, but I could not worry about that now. The military was coming up on the car. They were pointing their guns right at me as they circled the vehicle. One was talking on the radio and gesturing at me to the others. I was made.

I was too scared to question any one of those suggestions and did exactly what he said. I cranked up the tape player as loud as I could, spit on the camera, and held my breath for eons.

The crescendo on the stereo hit that saxophone's high C note.

The sudden loud music must have freaked them out. The sound of gunfire erupted all around me. I ducked in the seat punched send.

Everything went black.

Cleveland Maxwell stared blankly over downtown San Antonio from his perch at the fourth floor window of the Robert E. Lee Hotel, watching as the yellow lines of North Flores Avenue wove themselves together into a French braid. He was drunk again.

The current couple in 409 was quiet for the time being, probably smoking a cigarette or something.

Cleve took another hearty drought from his brown bag and reached for his crumbled pack of Marlboros, still staring absent-mindedly from his roost above North Flores. All in all, it had been a pretty easy weekend….

The three sharp knocks on the flimsy door of his room jarred Cleve back to reality…

TO: HOMEBASE

FROM: Current On-Duty Operative

RE: Cleveland Maxwell's Tales of the Alpha State

CC: SAC in Charge

DATE: Current

On Duty operative reports that it appears ALPHA signals are beginning to fade.

Regression back to BETA in progress.

This transmission concluded. Archived material returned to dossier.

Wow. That was a weird dream.

Man, I've got to go to work.